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THE
FROZEN DEEP



WENDE COLLETS





WAKE, FRANK! WAKE AND DEFEND YOURSELF "

THE FROZEN DEEP

And Other Tales

By ERIC COLLINGS

Author of "The Snow-Covered Mountains"



Illustrated by
J. H. B. B. B. B.

Printed and Published by the Author

CHATTO & WINDGATE, LTD., LONDON



WAKE, FRANK! WAKE AND DEFEND YOURSELF."

THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF

CHARLES THE FIRST

BY

JOHN BURNET

OF

SCOTLAND

AND

OF

THE

REIGN OF

CHARLES THE SECOND



Two women standing in a field.

THE FROZEN DEEP

And Other Tales.

BY

WILKIE COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," "THE MOONSTONE," ETC.



A NEW EDITION,

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY M. F. MAHONEY.

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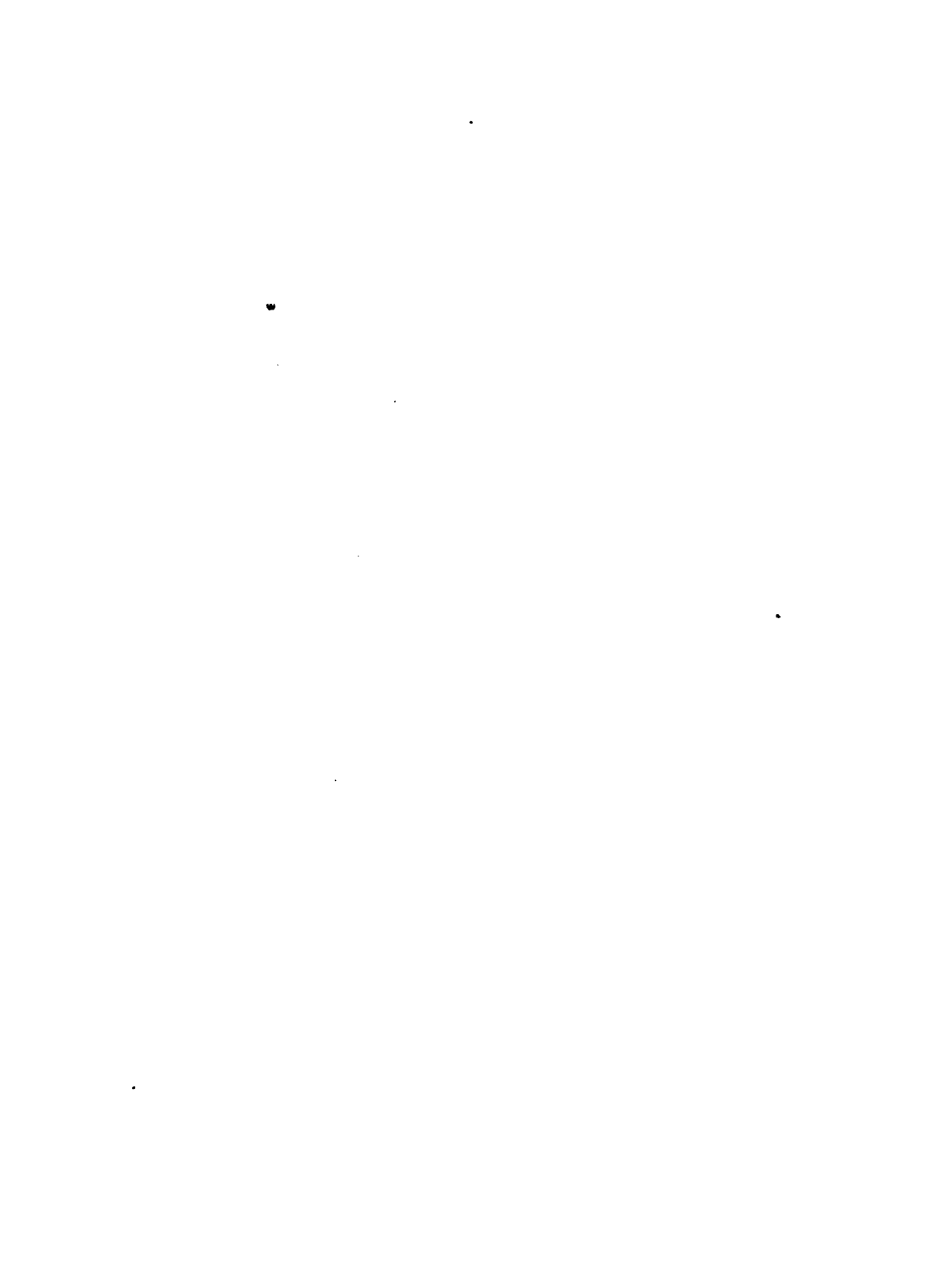
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TO
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

IN SINCERE ADMIRATION
OF HIS GENIUS AS POET, NOVELIST, ESSAYIST,

AND IN CORDIAL REMEMBRANCE
OF OUR INTERCOURSE
DURING MY VISIT TO AMERICA.



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THE FROZEN DEEP.

INTRODUCTORY LINES.

*(Relating the Adventures and Transformations of
The Frozen Deep.)*

As long ago as the year 1856 I wrote a play called "The Frozen Deep."

The work was first represented by amateur actors, at the house of the late Charles Dickens, on the 6th of January 1857. Mr. Dickens himself played the principal part, and played it with a truth, vigour, and pathos never to be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to witness the performance. The other personages of the story were represented by the ladies of Mr. Dickens's family, by the late Mark Lemon (editor of "Punch"), by the late Augustus Egg, R.A. (the artist), and by the author of the play.

The next appearance of "The Frozen Deep" (played by the amateur company) took place at the Gallery of Illustration, Regent Street, before the Queen and the Royal Family, by the Queen's

own command. After this special performance other representations of the work were given—first at the Gallery of Illustration, subsequently (with professional actresses) in some of the principal towns in England—for the benefit of the family of a well-beloved friend of ours, who died in 1857—the late Douglas Jerrold. At Manchester the play was twice performed—on the second evening in the presence of three thousand spectators. This was, I think, the finest of all the representations of “The Frozen Deep.” The extraordinary intelligence and enthusiasm of the great audience stimulated us all to do our best. Dickens surpassed himself. The trite phrase is the true phrase to describe that magnificent piece of acting. He literally electrified the audience.

I present here, as “a curiosity” which may be welcome to some of my readers, a portion of the original playbill of the performance at Manchester. To me it has now become one of the saddest memorials of the past that I possess. Of the **nine** amateur actors who played the men’s parts (one of them my brother, all of them my valued friends) but two are now living besides myself—Mr. Charles Dickens, jun., and Mr. Edward Pigott.

In Remembrance of the late Mr. Douglas Jerrold.

FREE TRADE HALL.

UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF MR. CHARLES DICKENS.

On FRIDAY Evening, Aug. 21, and on SATURDAY
Evening, Aug. 22, 1857,

AT EIGHT O'CLOCK EXACTLY,

Will be presented an entirely new Romantic Drama, in three Acts, by

MR. WILKIE COLLINS,

CALLED

THE FROZEN DEEP.

The Overture composed expressly for this Piece by Mr. FRANCESCO
BERGEB, who will conduct the ORCHESTRA.

*The Dresses by MESSRS. NATHAN, of Titchbourne Street, Haymarket, and Miss WILKINS,
of Carburton St., Finsroy Square. Ferruquier, MR. WILSON, of the Strand.*

CAPTAIN EDSWORTH	(of the 'Sea-Mew')	MR. EDWARD PIGOTT
CAPTAIN HELDING	(of the 'Wanderer')	MR. ALFRED DICKENS
LIEUTENANT CRAYFORD		MR. MARK LEMON
FRANK ALDBRELYN		MR. WILKIE COLLINS
RICHARD WARDOUR		MR. CHARLES DICKENS
LIEUTENANT STEVENTON		MR. YOUNG CHARLES*
JOHN WANT	(Ship's Cook)	MR. AUGUSTUS EGG
BATESON }	(two of the 'Sea-Mew's'	MR. SHIRLEY BROOKS
DARKER }	people)	MR. CHARLES COLLINS

(OFFICERS AND CREWS OF THE 'SEA-MEW' AND 'WANDERER'.)

MRS. STEVENTON	MRS. GEORGE VINING
ROSE EDSWORTH	MISS ELLEN SABINE
LUCY CRAYFORD	MISS ELLEN TERNAN
CLARA BURNHAM	MISS MARIA TERNAN
NURSE ESTHER	MRS. TERNAN
MAID	MISS MEWTE.†

The Scenery and Scenic Effects of the First Act by Mr. TELBIN.
The Scenery and Scenic Effects of the Second and Third Acts by Mr.
STANFIELD, R. A.

* A facetious nickname, invented by Dickens for his eldest son.

† Another nickname by Dickens for a young lady who had nothing to say.

The country performances being concluded, nearly ten years passed before the footlights shone again on "The Frozen Deep." In 1866 I accepted a proposal, made to me by Mr. Horace Wigan, to produce the play (with certain alterations and additions) on the public stage, at the Olympic Theatre, London. The first performance took place (while I was myself absent from England) on the 27th of November, in the year just mentioned. Mr. H. Neville acted the part "created" by Dickens.

Seven years passed after the production of the play at the Olympic Theatre, and then "The Frozen Deep" appealed once more to public favour, in another country than England, and under a totally new form.

I occupied the autumn and winter of 1873-74 most agreeably to myself, by a tour in the United States of America, receiving from the generous people of that great country a welcome which I shall remember proudly and gratefully to the end of my life. During my stay in America I read in public, in the principal cities, one of my shorter stories (enlarged and re-written for the purpose), called "The Dream-Woman." Concluding my tour at Boston, I was advised by my friends to give, if possible, a special attraction to my farewell reading in America, by presenting to my audience a new work. Having this object in view, and having but a short space of time at my disposal, I bethought myself of "The Frozen Deep." The

play had never been published, and I determined to re-write it in narrative form for a public reading. The experiment proved, on trial, to be far more successful than I had ventured to anticipate. Occupying nearly two hours in its delivery, the transformed "Frozen Deep" kept its hold from first to last on the interest and sympathies of the audience. I hope to have future opportunities of reading it in my own country, as well as in the United States.

Proposals having lately been made to me, in England and in America, to publish my "readings," I here present "The Frozen Deep" and "The Dream-Woman." The stories, as I print them, are in both instances considerably longer than the stories as I read them; the limits of time in the case of a public reading rendering it imperatively necessary to abridge without mercy developments of character and incident which are essential to the due presentation of a work in its literary form. I have only to add, for the benefit of those who may have seen, and who may not have forgotten, the play, that the narrative version of "The Frozen Deep" departs widely from the treatment of the story in the First Act of the dramatic version, but (with the one exception of the Third Scene) follows the play as closely as possible in the succeeding Acts.

The third and last story in the present collection (entitled "John Jago's Ghost") was sug-

gested to me by a printed account of a remarkable trial which took place in America some years since. This little work was written during my stay in New York and was published (periodically) in England in "The Home Journal."

W. C.

LONDON :

September, 1874.

THE STORY.

FIRST SCENE.

THE BALL-ROOM.

CHAPTER I.

THE date is between twenty and thirty years ago. The place is an English sea-port. The time is night. And the business of the moment is—dancing.

The Mayor and Corporation of the town are giving a grand ball, in celebration of the departure of an Arctic expedition from their port. The ships of the expedition are two in number—the “Wanderer” and the “Sea-Mew.” They are to sail (in search of the North-West Passage) on the next day, with the morning tide.

Honour to the Mayor and Corporation! It is a brilliant ball. The band is complete. The room is spacious. The large conservatory opening out of it is pleasantly lit with Chinese lanterns, and beautifully decorated with shrubs and flowers. All officers of the army and navy who are present

wear their uniforms in honour of the occasion. Among the ladies the display of dresses (a subject which the men don't understand) is bewildering, and the average of beauty (a subject which the men do understand) is the highest average attainable in all parts of the room.

For the moment the dance which is in progress is a quadrille. General admiration selects two of the ladies who are dancing as its favourite objects. One is a dark beauty in the prime of womanhood—the wife of First Lieutenant Crayford, of the "Wanderer." The other is a young girl, pale and delicate, dressed simply in white, with no ornament on her head but her own lovely brown hair. This is Miss Clara Burnham—an orphan. She is Mrs. Crayford's dearest friend, and she is to stay with Mrs. Crayford during the Lieutenant's absence in the Arctic regions. She is now dancing, with the Lieutenant himself for partner, and with Mrs. Crayford and Captain Holding (Commanding Officer of the "Wanderer") for *vis-à-vis*—in plain English, for opposite couple.

The conversation between Captain Holding and Mrs. Crayford, in one of the intervals of the dance, turns on Miss Burnham. The Captain is greatly interested in Clara. He admires her beauty, but he thinks her manner, for a young girl, strangely serious and subdued. Is she in delicate health?

Mrs. Crayford shakes her head, sighs mysteriously, and answers—

"In *very* delicate health, Captain Holding."

"Consumptive?"

"Not in the least."

"I am glad to hear that. She is a charming creature, Mrs. Crayford. She interests me indescribably. If I was only twenty years younger—perhaps (as I am *not* twenty years younger) I had better not finish the sentence? Is it indiscreet, my dear lady, to inquire what *is* the matter with her?"

"It might be indiscreet on the part of a stranger," said Mrs. Crayford. "An old friend like you may make any inquiries. I wish I could tell you what is the matter with Clara. It is a mystery to the doctors themselves. Some of the mischief is due, in my humble opinion, to the manner in which she has been brought up."

"Aye! aye! A bad school, I suppose?"

"Very bad, Captain Holding. But not the sort of school which you have in your mind at this moment. Clara's early years were spent in a lonely old house in the Highlands of Scotland. The ignorant people about her were the people who did the mischief which I have just been speaking of. They filled her mind with the superstitions which are still respected as truths in the wild north—especially the superstition called the Second Sight."

"God bless me!" cried the captain, "you don't mean to say she believes in such stuff as that? In these enlightened times, too!"

Mrs. Crayford looked at her partner with a satirical smile.

"In these enlightened times, Captain Holding, we only believe in dancing tables, and in messages sent from the other world by spirits who can't spell! By comparison with such superstitions as these, even the Second Sight has something—in the shape of poetry—to recommend it, surely? Estimate for yourself," she continued seriously, "the effect of such surroundings as I have described on a delicate sensitive young creature—a girl with a naturally imaginative temperament, leading a lonely neglected life. Is it so very surprising that she should catch the infection of the superstition about her? And is it quite incomprehensible that her nervous system should suffer accordingly, at a very critical period of her life?"

"Not at all, Mrs. Crayford—not at all, ma'am, as you put it. Still it *is* a little startling, to a commonplace man like me, to meet a young lady at a ball who believes in the Second Sight. Does she really profess to see into the future? Am I to understand that she positively falls into a trance, and sees people in distant countries, and foretells events to come? That is the Second Sight, is it not?"

"That is the Second Sight, Captain. And that is, really and positively, what she does."

"The young lady who is dancing opposite to us?"

“The young lady who is dancing opposite to us.”

The Captain waited a little—letting the new flood of information which had poured in on him settle itself steadily in his mind. This process accomplished, the Arctic explorer proceeded resolutely on his way to further discoveries.

“May I ask, ma’am, if you have ever seen her in a state of trance with your own eyes?” he inquired.

“My sister and I both saw her in the trance, little more than a month since,” Mrs. Crayford replied. “She had been nervous and irritable all the morning, and we took her out into the garden to breathe the fresh air. Suddenly, without any reason for it, the colour left her face. She stood between us, insensible to touch, insensible to sound, motionless as stone, and cold as death, in a moment. The first change we noticed came after a lapse of some minutes. Her hands began to move slowly, as if she was groping in the dark. Words dropped one by one from her lips, in a lost vacant tone as if she was talking in her sleep. Whether what she said referred to past or future I cannot tell you. She spoke of persons in a foreign country—perfect strangers to my sister and to me. After a little interval, she suddenly became silent. A momentary colour appeared in her face, and left it again. Her eyes closed, her feet failed her, and she sank insensible into our arms.”

“Sank insensible into your arms,” repeated the

Captain, absorbing his new information. "Most extraordinary! And—in this state of health—she goes out to parties and dances. More extraordinary still!"

"You are entirely mistaken," said Mrs. Crayford. "She is only here to-night to please me. And she is only dancing to please my husband. As a rule, she shuns all society. The doctor recommends change and amusement for her. She won't listen to him. Except on rare occasions like this, she persists in remaining at home."

Captain Holding brightened at the allusion to the doctor. Something practical might be got out of the doctor. Scientific man. Sure to see this very obscure subject under a new light. "How does it strike the doctor now?" said the Captain. "Viewed simply as a case, ma'am, how does it strike the doctor?"

"He will give no positive opinion," Mrs. Crayford answered. "He told me that such cases as Clara's were by no means unfamiliar to medical practice. 'We know,' he told me, 'that certain disordered conditions of the brain and the nervous system produce results quite as extraordinary as any that you have described—and there our knowledge ends. Neither my science, nor any man's science can clear up the mystery in this case. It is an especially difficult case to deal with, because Miss Burnham's early associations dispose her to attach a superstitious importance to the malady—

the hysterical malady, as some doctors would call it—from which she suffers. I can give you instructions for preserving her general health; and I can recommend you to try some change in her life—provided you first relieve her mind of any secret anxieties that may possibly be preying on it.”

The Captain smiled self-approvingly. The doctor had justified his anticipations. The doctor had suggested a practical solution of the difficulty.

“Ay! ay! At last we have hit the nail on the head! Secret anxieties. Yes! yes! Plain enough now. A disappointment in love—eh, Mrs. Crayford?”

“I don’t know, Captain Holding; I am quite in the dark. Clara’s confidence in me—in other matters unbounded—is, in this matter of her (supposed) anxieties, a confidence still withheld. In all else we are like sisters. I sometimes fear there may indeed be some trouble preying secretly on her mind. I sometimes feel a little hurt at her incomprehensible silence.”

Captain Holding was ready with his own practical remedy for this difficulty.

“Encouragement is all she wants, ma’am. Take my word for it, this matter rests entirely with you. It’s all in a nutshell. Encourage her to confide in you—and she *will* confide.”

“I am waiting to encourage her, Captain, until she is left alone with me—after you have all sailed

for the Arctic Seas. In the meantime, will you consider what I have said to you as intended for your ear only? And will you forgive me if I own that the turn the subject has taken does not tempt me to pursue it any farther?"

The Captain took the hint. He instantly changed the subject; choosing, on this occasion, safe professional topics. He spoke of ships that were ordered on foreign service; and, finding that these as subjects failed to interest Mrs. Crayford, he spoke next of ships that were ordered home again. This last experiment produced its effect—an effect which the Captain had not bargained for.

"Do you know," he began, "that the 'Atalanta' is expected back from the West Coast of Africa every day? Have you any acquaintances among the officers of that ship?"

As it so happened, he put those questions to Mrs. Crayford while they were engaged in one of the figures of the dance which brought them within hearing of the opposite couple. At the same moment—to the astonishment of her friends and admirers—Miss Clara Burnham threw the quadrille into confusion by making a mistake! Everybody waited to see her set the mistake right. She made no attempt to set it right—she turned deadly pale, and caught her partner by the arm.

"The heat!" she said faintly. "Take me away—take me into the air!"

Lieutenant Crayford instantly led her out of the

dance, and took her into the cool and empty conservatory at the end of the room. As a matter of course, Captain Holding and Mrs. Crayford left the quadrille at the same time. The Captain saw his way to a joke.

"Is this the trance coming on?" he whispered. "If it is, as commander of the Arctic Expedition, I have a particular request to make. Will the Second Sight oblige me by seeing the shortest way to the North-West Passage before we leave England?"

Mrs. Crayford declined to humour the joke. "If you will excuse my leaving you," she said quietly, "I will try and find out what is the matter with Miss Burnham."

At the entrance to the conservatory Mrs. Crayford encountered her husband. The Lieutenant was of middle age, tall and comely; a man with a winning simplicity and gentleness in his manner, and an irresistible kindness in his brave blue eyes. In one word, a man whom everybody loved—including his wife.

"Don't be alarmed," said the Lieutenant. "The heat has overcome her—that's all."

Mrs. Crayford shook her head, and looked at her husband, half satirically, half fondly.

"You dear old innocent!" she exclaimed, "that excuse may do for *you*. For my part, I don't believe a word of it. Go and get another partner, and leave Clara to me."

She entered the conservatory and seated herself by Clara's side.

CHAPTER II.

"Now, my dear!" (Mrs. Crayford began) "what does this mean?"

"Nothing."

"That won't do, Clara. Try again."

"The heat of the room——"

"That won't do either. Say that you choose to keep your own secrets, and I shall understand what you mean."

Clara's sad clear grey eyes looked up for the first time in Mrs. Crayford's face, and suddenly became dimmed with tears.

"If I only dared tell you!" she murmured. "I hold so to your good opinion of me, Lucy—and I am so afraid of losing it."

Mrs. Crayford's manner changed. Her eyes rested gravely and anxiously on Clara's face.

"You know as well as I do that nothing can shake my affection for you," she said. "Do justice, my child, to your old friend. There is nobody here to listen to what we say. Open your heart, Clara. I see you are in trouble, and I want to comfort you."

Clara began to yield. In other words, she began to make conditions.

"Will you promise to keep what I tell you a secret from every living creature?" she began.

5-9 Mrs. Crayford met that question by putting a question on her side.

"Does 'every living creature' include my husband?"

"Your husband more than anybody! I love him, I revere him. He is so noble; he is so good! If I told him what I am going to tell you, he would despise me. Own it plainly, Lucy, if I am asking too much in asking you to keep a secret from your husband."

"Nonsense, child! When you are married you will know that the easiest of all secrets to keep is a secret from your husband. I give you my promise. Now begin!"

Clara hesitated painfully.

"I don't know how to begin!" she exclaimed with a burst of despair. "The words won't come to me."

"Then I must help you. Do you feel ill to-night? Do you feel as you felt that day when you were with my sister and me in the garden?"

"Oh, no."

"You are not ill, you are not really affected by the heat—and yet you turn as pale as ashes, and you are obliged to leave the quadrille! There must be some reason for this."

"There *is* a reason. Captain Holding —"

"Captain Holding! What in the name of wonder has the Captain to do with it?"

"He told you something about the 'Atalanta.' He said the 'Atalanta' was expected back from Africa immediately."

"Well, and what of that? Is there anybody in whom you are interested coming home in the ship?"

"Somebody whom I am afraid of is coming home in the ship."

Mrs. Crayford's magnificent black eyes opened wide in amazement.

"My dear Clara! do you really mean what you say?"

"Wait a little, Lucy, and you shall judge for yourself. We must go back—if I am to make you understand me—to the year before we knew each other; to the last year of my father's life. Did I ever tell you that my father moved southward, for the sake of his health, to a house in Kent that was lent to him by a friend?"

"No, my dear. I don't remember ever hearing of the house in Kent. Tell me about it."

"There is nothing to tell—except this. The new house was near a fine country seat standing in its own park. The owner of the place was a gentleman named Wardour. He, too, was one of my father's Kentish friends. He had an only son."

She paused, and played nervously with her fan. Mrs. Crayford looked at her attentively. Clara's

eyes remained fixed on her fan—Clara said no more.

“What was the son’s name?” asked Mrs. Crayford, quietly.

“Richard.”

“Am I right, Clara, in suspecting that Mr. Richard Wardour admired you?”

The question produced its intended effect. The question helped Clara to go on.

“I hardly knew at first,” she said, “whether he admired me or not. He was very strange in his ways—headstrong, terribly headstrong and passionate; but generous and affectionate in spite of his faults of temper. Can you understand such a character?”

“Such characters exist by thousands. I have my faults of temper. I begin to like Richard already. Go on.”

“The days went by, Lucy, and the weeks went by. We were thrown very much together. I began, little by little, to have some suspicion of the truth.”

“And Richard helped to confirm your suspicions, of course?”

“No. He was not—unhappily for me—he was not that sort of man. He never spoke of the feeling with which he regarded me. It was I who saw it. I couldn’t help seeing it. I did all I could to show that I was willing to be a sister to him, and that I could never be anything else. He

did not understand me, or he would not—I can't say which."

"'Would not' is the most likely, my dear. Go on."

"It might have been as you say. There was a strange rough bashfulness about him. He confused and puzzled me. He never spoke out. He seemed to treat me as if our future lives had been provided for while we were children. What could I do, Lucy?"

"Do? You could have asked your father to end the difficulty for you."

"Impossible! You forget what I have just told you. My father was suffering at that time under the illness which afterwards caused his death. He was quite unfit to interfere."

"Was there no one else who could help you?"

"No one."

"No lady in whom you could confide?"

"I had acquaintances among the ladies in the neighbourhood. I had no friends."

"What did you do, then?"

"Nothing. I hesitated; I put off coming to an explanation with him—unfortunately until it was too late."

"What do you mean by too late?"

"You shall hear. I ought to have told you that Richard Wardour is in the navy——"

"Indeed? I am more interested in him than ever. Well?"

“One spring day, Richard came to our house to take leave of us before he joined his ship. I thought he was gone, and I went into the next room. It was my own sitting-room, and it opened on to the garden.”

“Yes?”

“Richard must have been watching me. He suddenly appeared in the garden. Without waiting for me to invite him, he walked into the room. I was a little startled as well as surprised, but I managed to hide it. I said, ‘What is it, Mr. Wardour?’ He stepped close up to me; he said, in his quick rough way: ‘Clara; I am going to the African coast. If I live, I shall come back promoted; and we both know what will happen then.’ He kissed me. I was half frightened, half angry. Before I could compose myself to say a word, he was out in the garden again—he was gone! I ought to have spoken, I know. It was not honourable, not kind towards *him*. You can’t reproach me for my want of courage, and frankness more bitterly than I reproach myself!”

“My dear child, I don’t reproach you. I only think you might have written to him.”

“I did write.”

“Plainly?”

“Yes. I told him in so many words that he was deceiving himself, and that I could never marry him.”

“Plain enough, in all conscience! Having said

that, surely you are not to blame? What are you fretting about now?"

"Suppose my letter has never reached him?"

"Why should you suppose anything of the sort?"

"What I wrote required an answer, Lucy—*asked* for an answer. The answer has never come. What is the plain conclusion? My letter has never reached him. And the 'Atalanta' is expected back! Richard Wardour is returning to England—Richard Wardour will claim me as his wife! You wondered just now if I really meant what I said. Do you doubt it still?"

Mrs. Crayford leaned back absently in her chair. For the first time since the conversation had begun, she let a question pass without making a reply. The truth is, Mrs. Crayford was thinking.

She saw Clara's position plainly; she understood the disturbing effect of it on the mind of a young girl. Still, making all allowances, she felt quite at a loss, so far, to account for Clara's excessive agitation. Her quick observing faculty had just detected that Clara's face showed no signs of relief, now that she had unburdened herself of her secret. There was something clearly under the surface here—something of importance, that still remained to be discovered. A shrewd doubt crossed Mrs. Crayford's mind, and inspired the next words which she addressed to her young friend.

"My dear," she said abruptly, "have you told me all?"

Clara started as if the question terrified her. Feeling sure that she had the clue in her hand, Mrs. Crayford deliberately repeated her question in another form of words. Instead of answering, Clara suddenly looked up. At the same moment a faint flush of colour appeared in her face for the first time.

Looking up instinctively on her side, Mrs. Crayford became aware of the presence in the conservatory of a young gentleman who was claiming Clara as his partner in the coming waltz. Mrs. Crayford fell into thinking once more. Had this young gentleman (she asked herself) anything to do with the untold end of the story? Was *this* the true secret of Clara Burnham's terror at the impending return of Richard Wardour? Mrs. Crayford decided on putting her doubts to the test.

"A friend of yours, my dear?" she asked innocently. "Suppose you introduce us to each other?"

Clara confusedly introduced the young gentleman.

"Mr. Francis Aldersley, Lucy. Mr. Aldersley belongs to the Arctic Expedition."

"Attached to the Expedition," Mrs. Crayford repeated. "I am attached to the Expedition too—in my way. I had better introduce myself, Mr. Aldersley, as Clara seems to have forgotten to do

it for me. I am Mrs. Crayford. My husband is Lieutenant Crayford of the 'Wanderer.' Do you belong to that ship?"

"I have not the honour, Mrs. Crayford. I belong to the 'Sea-Mew.'"

Mrs. Crayford's superb eyes looked shrewdly backwards and forwards between Clara and Francis Aldersley, and saw the untold sequel to Clara's story. The young officer was a bright, handsome, gentlemanlike lad—just the person to seriously complicate the difficulty with Richard Wardour! There was no time for making any further inquiries. The band had begun the prelude to the waltz, and Francis Aldersley was waiting for his partner. With a word of apology to the young man, Mrs. Crayford drew Clara aside for a moment and spoke to her in a whisper.

"One word, my dear, before you return to the ball-room. It may sound conceited—after the little you have told me—but I think I understand your position *now* better than you do yourself. Do you want to hear my opinion?"

"I am longing to hear it, Lucy! I want your opinion; I want your advice."

"You shall have both, in the plainest and the fewest words. First, my opinion: You have no choice but to come to an explanation with Mr. Wardour as soon as he returns. Second, my advice: If you wish to make the explanation

easy to both sides, take care that you make it in the character of a free woman."

She laid a strong emphasis on the last three words, and looked pointedly at Francis Aldersley as she pronounced them. "I won't keep you from your partner any longer, Clara," she resumed, and led the way back to the ball-room.

CHAPTER III.

THE burden on Clara's mind weighs on it more heavily than ever after what Mrs. Crayford has said to her. She is too unhappy to feel the inspiriting influence of the dance. After a turn round the room, she complains of fatigue. Mr. Francis Aldersley looks at the conservatory (still as invitingly cool and empty as ever), leads her back to it, and places her on a seat among the shrubs. She tries—very feebly—to dismiss him.

"Don't let me keep you from dancing, Mr. Aldersley."

He seats himself by her side, and feasts his eyes on the lovely downcast face that dares not turn towards him. He whispers to her :

"Call me Frank."

She longs to call him Frank—she loves him with all her heart. But Mrs. Crayford's warning words are still in her mind. She never opens her lips. Her lover moves a little closer, and asks

another favour. Men are all alike on these occasions. Silence invariably encourages them to try again.

“Clara! have you forgotten what I said at the concert yesterday? May I say it again?”

“No!”

“We shall sail to-morrow for the Arctic Seas. I may not return for years. Don't send me away without hope! Think of the long lonely time in the dark North! Make it a happy time for *me*.”

Though he speaks with the fervour of a man, he is little more than a lad; he is only twenty years old—and he is going to risk his young life on the frozen deep! Clara pities him as she never pitied any human creature before. He gently takes her hand. She tries to release it.

“What! Not even that little favour on the last night?”

Her faithful heart takes his part, in spite of her. Her hand remains in his, and feels its soft persuasive pressure. She is a lost woman. It is only a question of time now!

“Clara! do you love me?”

There is a pause. She shrinks from looking at him—she trembles with strange contradictory sensations of pleasure and pain. His arm steals round her: he repeats his question in a whisper; his lips almost touch her little rosy ear as he says it again:

“Do you love me?”

She closes her eyes faintly—she hears nothing but those words—feels nothing but his arm round her—forgets Mrs. Crayford's warning—forgets Richard Wardour himself—turns suddenly, with a loving woman's desperate disregard of everything but her love, nestles her head on his bosom, and answers him in that way at last!

He lifts the beautiful drooping head—their lips meet in their first kiss—they are both in heaven—it is Clara who brings them back to earth again with a start—it is Clara who says, "Oh! what have I done?"—as usual, when it is too late.

Frank answers the question.

"You have made me happy, my angel. Now, when I come back, I come back to make you my wife."

She shudders. She remembers Richard Wardour again at those words.

"Mind!" she says, "nobody is to know we are engaged till I permit you to mention it. Remember that!"

He promises to remember it. His arm tries to wind round her once more. No! She is mistress of herself; she can positively dismiss him now—after she has let him kiss her!

"Go!" she says. "I want to see Mrs. Crayford. Find her! Say I am here, waiting to speak to her. Go at once, Frank—for my sake!"

There is no alternative but to obey her. His eyes drink a last draught of her beauty. He

hurries away on his errand—the happiest man in the room. Five minutes since, she was only his partner in the dance. He has spoken—and she has pledged herself to be his partner for life!

CHAPTER IV.

It was not easy to find Mrs. Crayford in the crowd. Searching here and searching there, Frank became conscious of a stranger, who appeared to be looking for somebody on his side. He was a dark, heavy-browed, strongly-built man; dressed in a shabby old naval officer's uniform. His manner—strikingly resolute and self-contained—was unmistakably the manner of a gentleman. He wound his way slowly through the crowd; stopping to look at every lady whom he passed, and then looking away again with a frown. Little by little he approached the conservatory—entered it, after a moment's reflection—detected the glimmer of a white dress in the distance, through the shrubs and flowers—advanced to get a nearer view of the lady—and burst into Clara's presence with a cry of delight.

She sprang to her feet. She stood before him speechless, motionless, struck to stone. All her life was in her eyes—the eyes which told her she was looking at Richard Wardour.

He was the first to speak.

"I am sorry I startled you, my darling. I forgot everything but the happiness of seeing you again. We only reached our moorings two hours since. I was some time inquiring after you, and some time getting my ticket, when they told me you were at the ball. Wish me joy, Clara! I am promoted. I have come back to make you my wife."

A momentary change passed over the blank terror of her face. Her colour rose faintly, her lips moved. She abruptly put a question to him.

"Did you get my letter?"

He started. "A letter from you? I never received it."

The momentary animation died out of her face again. She drew back from him, and dropped into a chair. He advanced towards her, astonished and alarmed. She shrank in the chair—shrank, as if she was frightened of him.

"Clara! you have not even shaken hands with me! What does it mean?"

He paused, waiting, and watching her. She made no reply. A flash of the quick temper in him leapt up in his eyes. He repeat his last words in louder and sterner tones:

"What does it mean?"

She replied this time. His tone had hurt her—his tone had roused her sinking courage.

"It means, Mr. Wardour, that you have been mistaken from the first."

"How have I been mistaken?"

"You have been under a wrong impression, and you have given me no opportunity of setting you right."

"In what way have I been wrong?"

"You have been too hasty and too confident about yourself and about me. You have entirely misunderstood me. I am grieved to distress you, but for your sake I must speak plainly. I am your friend always, Mr. Wardour. I can never be your wife."

He mechanically repeated the last words. He seemed to doubt whether he had heard her aright.

"You can never be my wife?"

"Never!"

"Why?"

There was no answer. She was incapable of telling him a falsehood. She was ashamed to tell him the truth.

He stooped over her, and suddenly possessed himself of her hand. Holding her hand firmly, he stooped a little lower, searching for the signs which might answer him in her face. His own face darkened slowly while he looked. He was beginning to suspect her, and he acknowledged it in his next words.

"Something has changed you towards me, Clara. Somebody has influenced you against me. Is it—you force me to ask the question—is it some other man?"

You have no right to ask me that."

He went on without noticing what she had said to him.

"Has that other man come between you and me? I speak plainly on my side. Speak plainly on yours."

"I *have* spoken. I have nothing more to say."

There was a pause. She saw the warning light which told of the fire within him, growing brighter and brighter in his eyes. She felt his grasp strengthening on her hand. She heard him appeal to her for the last time.

"Reflect," he said, "reflect before it is too late. Your silence will not serve you. If you persist in not answering me, I shall take your silence as a confession. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you."

"Clara Burnham! I am not to be trifled with. Clara Burnham! I insist on the truth. Are you false to me?"

She resented that searching question with a woman's keen sense of the insult that is implied in doubting her to her face.

"Mr. Wardour! you forget yourself when you call me to account in that way. I never encouraged you. I never gave you promise or pledge——"

He passionately interrupted her before she could say more.

"You have engaged yourself in my absence.

Your words own it; your looks own it! You have engaged yourself to another man!"

"If I *have* engaged myself, what right have you to complain of it?" she answered firmly. "What right have you to control my actions——?"

The next words died away on her lips. He suddenly dropped her hand. A marked change appeared in the expression of his eyes—a change which told her of the terrible passions that she had let loose in him. She read, dimly read, something in his face which made her tremble—not for herself, but for Frank.

Little by little the dark colour faded out of his face. His deep voice dropped suddenly to a low and quiet tone as he spoke the parting words.

"Say no more, Miss Burnham—you have said enough. I am answered; I am dismissed." He paused, and stepping close up to her, laid his hand on her arm.

"The time may come," he said, "when I shall forgive *you*. But the man who has robbed me of you shall rue the day when you and he first met."

He turned, and left her.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Crayford, entering the conservatory, was met by one of the attendants at the ball. The man stopped as if he wished to speak to her.



“Say no more, Miss Burnham—you have said enough. I am answered; I am dismissed.”—p. 32



“What do you want?” she asked.

“I beg your pardon, ma'am. Do you happen to have a smelling-bottle about you? There is a young lady in the conservatory who is taken faint.”

BETWEEN THE SCENES.

THE LANDING STAGE.

CHAPTER V.

THE morning of the next day—the morning on which the ships were to sail—came bright and breezy. Mrs. Crayford, having arranged to follow her husband to the water-side and see the last of him before he embarked, entered Clara's room on her way out of the house, anxious to hear how her young friend had passed the night. To her astonishment, she found Clara had risen and was dressed, like herself, to go out.

“What does this mean, my dear? After what you suffered last night—after the shock of seeing that man—why don't you take my advice and rest in your bed?”

“I can't rest. I have not slept all night. Have you been out yet?”

“No.”

“Have you seen or heard anything of Richard Wardour?”

“What an extraordinary question!”

"Answer my question! Don't trifle with me!"

"Compose yourself, Clara. I have neither seen nor heard anything of Richard Wardour. Take my word for it, he is far enough away by this time."

"No! He is here! He is near us! All night long the presentiment has pursued me—Frank and Richard Wardour will meet."

"My dear child, what are you thinking of? They are total strangers to each other."

"Something will happen to bring them together. I feel it! I know it! They will meet; there will be a mortal quarrel between them, and I shall be to blame. Oh, Lucy! why didn't I take your advice? Why was I mad enough to let Frank know that I loved him? Are you going to the landing-stage? I am all ready; I must go with you."

"You must not think of it, Clara. There will be crowding and confusion at the water-side. You are not strong enough to bear it. Wait—I won't be long away—wait till I come back."

"I must, and will, go with you! Crowd! *He* will be among the crowd! Confusion! In that confusion *he* will find his way to Frank! Don't ask me to wait. I shall go mad if I wait. I shall not know a moment's ease until I have seen Frank with my own eyes safe in the boat which takes him to his ship. You have got your bonnet on; what are we stopping here for? Come! or I shall

go without you. Look at the clock! We have not a moment to lose!"

It was useless to contend with her. Mrs. Crayford yielded. The two women left the house together.

The landing-stage, as Mrs. Crayford had predicted, was thronged with spectators. Not only the relatives and friends of the Arctic voyagers, but strangers as well, had assembled in large numbers to see the ships sail. Clara's eyes wandered affrightedly hither and thither among the strange faces in the crowd, searching for the one face that she dreaded to see, and not finding it. So completely were her nerves unstrung, that she started with a cry of alarm on suddenly hearing Frank's voice behind her.

"The 'Sea-Mew's' boats are waiting," he said. "I must go, darling. How pale you are looking, Clara! Are you ill?"

She never answered. She questioned him with wild eyes and trembling lips.

"Has anything happened to you, Frank? anything out of the common?"

Frank laughed at the strange question.

"Anything out of the common?" he repeated. "Nothing that I know of, except sailing for the Arctic Seas. That's out of the common, I suppose; isn't it?"

"Has anybody spoken to you since last night? Has any stranger followed you in the street?"

Frank turned in blank amazement to Mrs. Crayford.

“What on earth does she mean?”

Mrs. Crayford’s lively invention supplied her with an answer on the spur of the moment.

“Do you believe in dreams, Frank? Of course you don’t! Clara has been dreaming about you, and Clara is foolish enough to believe in dreams. That’s all; it’s not worth talking about. Hark! they are calling you. Say good-bye, or you will be too late for the boat.”

Frank took Clara’s hand. Long afterwards—in the dark Arctic days, in the dreary Arctic nights—he remembered how coldly and how passively that hand lay in his.

“Courage, Clara!” he said gaily. “A sailor’s sweetheart must accustom herself to partings. The time will soon pass. Good-bye, my darling! Good-bye, my wife!”

He kissed the cold hand; he looked his last—for many a long year perhaps!—at the pale and beautiful face. How she loves me! he thought. How the parting distresses her! He still held her hand; he would have lingered longer, if Mrs. Crayford had not wisely waived all ceremony and pushed him away.

The two ladies followed him at a safe distance through the crowd, and saw him step into the boat. The oars struck the water; Frank waved his cap to Clara. In a moment more a vessel at anchor

hid the boat from view. They had seen the last of him on his way to the Frozen Deep!

"No Richard Wardour in the boat," said Mrs. Crayford. "No Richard Wardour on the shore. Let this be a lesson to you, my dear. Never be foolish enough to believe in presentiments again."

Clara's eyes still wandered suspiciously to and fro among the crowd.

"Are you not satisfied yet?" asked Mrs. Crayford.

"No," Clara answered. "I am not satisfied yet."

"What! still looking for him? This is really too absurd. Here is my husband coming. I shall tell him to call a cab and send you home."

Clara drew back a few steps.

"I won't be in the way, Lucy, while you are taking leave of your good husband," she said. "I will wait here."

"Wait here! What for?"

"For something which I may yet see. Or for something which I may still hear."

"Richard Wardour?"

"Richard Wardour."

Mrs. Crayford turned to her husband without another word. Clara's infatuation was beyond the reach of remonstrance.

The boats of the "Wanderer" took the place at the landing-stage vacated by the boats of the "Sea-

Mew." A burst of cheering among the outer ranks of the crowd announced the arrival of the commander of the Expedition on the scene. Captain Holding appeared, looking right and left for his first lieutenant. Finding Crayford with his wife, the captain made his apologies for interfering with his best grace.

"Give him up to his professional duties for one minute, Mrs. Crayford, and you shall have him back again for half an hour. The Arctic Expedition is to blame, my dear lady—not the captain—for parting man and wife. In Crayford's place I should have left it to the bachelors to find the North-west Passage, and have stopped at home with you."

Excusing himself in those bluntly complimentary terms, Captain Holding drew the lieutenant aside a few steps, accidentally taking a direction that led the two officers close to the place at which Clara was standing. Both the captain and the lieutenant were too completely absorbed in their professional duties to notice her. Neither the one nor the other had the faintest suspicion that she could, and did, hear every word of the talk that passed between them.

"You received my note this morning?" the captain began.

"Certainly, Captain Holding, or I should have been on board the ship long before this."

"I am going on board myself at once," the cap-

tain proceeded. "But I must ask you to keep your boat waiting for half an hour more. You will be all the longer with your wife, you know. I thought of that, Crayford."

"I am much obliged to you, Captain Holding. I suppose there is some other reason for inverting the customary order of things, and keeping the lieutenant on shore after the captain is on board?"

"Quite true; there *is* another reason. I want you to wait for a volunteer who has just joined us."

"A volunteer!"

"Yes; he has his outfit to get in a hurry, and he may be half an hour late."

"It's rather a sudden appointment, isn't it?"

"No doubt. Very sudden."

"And, pardon me, it's rather a long time (as we are situated) to keep the ships waiting for one man?"

"Quite true, again. But a man who is worth having is worth waiting for. This man is worth having; this man is worth his weight in gold to such an expedition as ours. Seasoned to all climates and all fatigues; a strong fellow, a brave fellow, a clever fellow—in short, an excellent officer. I know him well, or I should never have taken him. The country gets plenty of work out of my new volunteer, Crayford. He only returned yesterday from foreign service."

"He only returned yesterday from foreign service, and he volunteers this morning to join the Arctic Expedition! You astonish me."

“ I dare say I do ; you can't be more astonished than I was when he presented himself at my hotel and told me what he wanted. ‘ Why, my good fellow, you have just got home,’ I said ; ‘ are you weary of your freedom after only a few hours' experience of it ? ’ His answer rather startled me. He said, ‘ I am weary of my life, sir ; I have come home and found a trouble to welcome me which goes near to break my heart. If I don't take refuge in absence and hard work, I am a lost man. Will you give me refuge ? ’ That's what he said, Crayford, word for word.”

“ Did you ask him to explain himself further ? ”

“ Not I ; I knew his value, and I took the poor devil on the spot without pestering him with any more questions. No need to ask him to explain himself ; the facts speak for themselves in these cases. The old story, my good friend. There's a woman at the bottom of it, of course.”

Mrs. Crayford, waiting for the return of her husband as patiently as she could, was startled by feeling a hand suddenly laid on her shoulder. She looked round and confronted Clara. Her first feeling of surprise changed instantly to alarm. Clara was trembling from head to foot.

“ What is the matter ? What has frightened you, my dear ? ”

“ Lucy ! I *have* heard of him ! ”

“ Richard Wardour again ? ”

"Remember what I told you. I have heard every word of the conversation between Captain Holding and your husband. A man came to the Captain this morning and volunteered to join the 'Wanderer.' The Captain has taken him. The man is Richard Wardour."

"You don't mean it! Are you sure? Did you hear Captain Holding mention his name?"

"No."

"Then how do you know it's Richard Wardour?"

"Don't ask me! I am as certain of it as that I am standing here! They are going away together, Lucy—away to the eternal ice and snow. My foreboding has come true. The two will meet—the man who is to marry me, and the man whose heart I have broken!"

"Your foreboding has *not* come true, Clara! The men have not met here—the men are not likely to meet elsewhere. Even supposing it is Wardour, they are appointed to separate ships. Frank belongs to the 'Sea-Mew,' and Wardour to the 'Wanderer.' See! My husband is coming this way. Let me speak to him."

Lieutenant Crayford returned to his wife. She spoke to him instantly.

"William, have you got a new volunteer who joins the 'Wanderer?'"

"What! you have been listening to the Captain and me?"

"I want to know his name."

“How in the world did you manage to hear what we said to each other?”

“His name? has the Captain given you his name?”

“Don't excite yourself, my dear. Look! you are positively alarming Miss Burnham. The new volunteer is a perfect stranger to us. There is his name—last on the ship's list.”

Mrs. Crayford snatched the list out of her husband's hand, and read the name:

“RICHARD WARDOUR.”

SECOND SCENE.

THE HUT OF THE SEA-MEW.

CHAPTER VI.

GOOD-BYE to England! Good-bye to inhabited and civilised regions of the earth!

Two years have passed since the voyagers sailed from their native shores. The enterprise has failed—the Arctic Expedition is lost and ice-locked in the Polar wastes. The good ships “Wanderer” and “Sea-Mew,” entombed in ice, will never ride the buoyant waters more. Stripped of their lighter timbers, both vessels have been used for the construction of huts, erected on the nearest land.

The largest of the two buildings which now shelter the lost men, is occupied by the surviving officers and crew of the “Sea-Mew.” On one side of the principal room are the sleeping-berths and the fireplace. The other side discloses a broad doorway (closed by a canvas screen), which serves as means of communication with an inner apartment, devoted to the superior officers. A ham-

mock is slung to the rough raftered roof of the main room as an extra bed. A man, completely hidden by his bedclothes, is sleeping in the hammock. By the fireside there is a second man—supposed to be on the watch—fast asleep, poor wretch! at the present moment. Behind the sleeper stands an old cask, which serves for a table. The objects at present on the table are a pestle and mortar, and a saucepan full of dry bones of animals. In plain words, the dinner for the day. By way of ornament to the dull brown walls, icicles appear in the crevices of the timber, gleaming at intervals in the red firelight. No wind whistles outside the lonely dwelling—no cry of bird or beast is heard. Indoors and out of doors, the awful silence of the polar desert reigns, for the moment, undisturbed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE first sound that broke the silence came from the inner apartment. An officer lifted the canvas screen in the hut of the "Sea-Mew," and entered the main room. Cold and privation had sadly thinned the ranks. The commander of the ship—Captain Ebsworth—was dangerously ill. The first lieutenant was dead. An officer of the "Wanderer" filled their places for the time, with Captain Holding's permission. The officer so employed was—Lieutenant Crayford.

He approached the man at the fireside and awakened him.

"Jump up, Bateson! It's your turn to be relieved."

The relief appeared, rising from a heap of old sails at the back of the hut. Bateson vanished, yawning, to his bed. Lieutenant Crayford walked backwards and forwards briskly, trying what exercise would do towards warming his blood.

The pestle and mortar on the cask attracted his attention. He stopped and looked up at the man in the hammock.

"I must rouse the cook," he said to himself, with a smile. "That fellow little thinks how useful he is in keeping up my spirits. The most inveterate croaker and grumbler in the world—and yet, according to his own account, the only cheerful man in the whole ship's company. John Want! John Want! Rouse up, there!"

A head rose slowly out of the bedclothes, covered with a red night-cap. A melancholy nose rested itself on the edge of the hammock. A voice, worthy of the nose, expressed its opinion of the Arctic climate in these words:

"Lord! Lord! here's all my breath on my blanket. Icicles, if you please, sir, all round my mouth and all over my blanket. Every time I have snored I've frozen something. When a man gets the cold into him to that extent that he ices his own bed, it can't last much longer. Never mind! *I don't grumble.*"

Crayford tapped the saucepan of bones im-

patiently. John Want lowered himself to the floor—grumbling all the way—by a rope attached to the rafters at his bed head. Instead of approaching his superior officer and his saucepan he hobbled, shivering, to the fireplace, and held his chin as close as he possibly could over the fire. Crayford looked after him.

“Hullo! what are you doing there?”

“Thawing my beard, sir.”

“Come here directly, and set to work on these bones.”

John Want remained immovably attached to the fireplace, holding something else over the fire. Crayford began to lose his temper,

“What the devil are you about now?”

“Thawing my watch, sir. It’s been under my pillow all night, and the cold has stopped it. Cheerful, wholesome, bracing sort of climate to live in, isn’t it, sir? Never mind! *I* don’t grumble.”

“No; we all know that. Look here! Are these bones pounded small enough?”

John Want suddenly approached the lieutenant, and looked at him with an appearance of the deepest interest.

“You’ll excuse me, sir,” he said; “how very hollow your voice sounds this morning!”

“Never mind my voice. The bones! the bones!”

“Yes, sir—the bones. They’ll take a trifle more pounding. I’ll do my best with them, sir, for your sake.”

“What do you mean?”

John Want shook his head, and looked at Crayford with a dreary smile.

“I don’t think I shall have the honour of making much more bone soup for you, sir. Do you think yourself you’ll last long, sir? I don’t, saving your presence. I think about another week or ten days will do for us all. Never mind. I don’t grumble.”

He poured the bones into the mortar and began to pound them—under protest. At the same moment a sailor appeared, entering from the inner hut.

“A message from Captain Ebsworth, sir.”

“Well?”

“The Captain is worse than ever with his freezing pains, sir. He wants to see you immediately.”

“I will go at once. Rouse the doctor.”

Answering in those terms, Crayford returned to the inner hut, followed by the sailor. John Want shook his head again, and smiled more drearily than ever.

“Rouse the doctor,” he repeated. “Suppose the doctor should be frozen? He hadn’t a ha’porth of warmth in him last night, and his voice sounded like a whisper in a speaking trumpet. Will the bones do now? Yes, the bones will do now. Into the saucepan with you,” cried John Want, suiting the action to the word, “and flavour the hot water if you can! When I remember that I was

once an apprentice at a pastrycook's—when I think of the gallons of turtle-soup that this hand has stirred up in a jolly hot kitchen—and when I find myself mixing bones and hot water for soup, and turning into ice as fast as I can, if I wasn't of a cheerful disposition I should feel inclined to grumble. John Want! John Want! Whatever had you done with your natural senses, when you made up your mind to go to sea?"

A new voice hailed the cook, speaking from one of the bedplaces in the side of the hut. It was the voice of Francis Aldersley.

"Who's that croaking over the fire?"

"Croaking?" repeated John Want, with the air of a man who considered himself the object of a gratuitous insult. "Croaking? You don't find your own voice at all altered for the worse—do you, Mr. Frank? I don't give *him*," John proceeded, speaking confidentially to himself, "more than six hours to last. He's one of your grumblers."

"What are you doing there?" asked Frank.

"I'm making bone soup, sir, and wondering why I ever went to sea."

"Well, and why did you go to sea?"

"I'm not certain, Mr. Frank. Sometimes I think it was natural perversity; sometimes I think it was false pride at getting over sea-sickness sometimes I think it was reading Robinson Crusoe and books warning of me *not* to go to sea."

Frank laughed. "You're an odd fellow. What do you mean by false pride at getting over sea-sickness? Did you get over sea-sickness in some new way?"

John Want's dismal face brightened in spite of himself. Frank had recalled to the cook's memory one of the noteworthy passages in the cook's life.

"That's it, sir!" he said. "If ever a man cured sea-sickness in a new way yet, I am that man—I got over it, Mr. Frank, by dint of hard eating. I was a passenger on board a packet-boat, sir, when first I saw blue water. A nasty lopp of a sea came on at dinner time, and I began to feel queer the moment the soup was put on the table. 'Sick?' says the captain. 'Rather, sir,' says I. 'Will you try my cure?' says the captain. 'Certainly, sir,' says I. 'Is your heart in your mouth yet?' says the captain. 'Not quite, sir,' says I. 'Mock-turtle soup,' says the captain, and helps me. I swallow a couple of spoonfuls, and turn as white as a sheet. The captain cocks his eye at me. 'Go on deck, sir,' says he, 'get rid of the soup, and then come back to the cabin.' I got rid of the soup, and then came back to the cabin. 'Cod's head-and-shoulders,' says the captain, and helps me. 'I can't stand it, sir,' says I. 'You must,' says the captain, 'because it's the cure.' I crammed down a mouthful and turned paler than ever. 'Go on deck,' says the captain. 'Get rid of the cod's head, and come back to the

cabin.' Off I go, and back I come. 'Boiled leg of mutton and trimmings,' says the captain, and helps me. 'No fat, sir!' says I. 'Fat's the cure,' says the captain, and makes me eat it. 'Lean's the cure' says the captain, and makes me eat it. 'Steady?' says the captain. 'Sick,' says I. 'Go on deck,' says the captain, 'get rid of the boiled leg of mutton and trimmings, and come back to the cabin. Off I go, staggering—back I come, more dead than alive. 'Devilled kidneys,' says the captain. I shut my eyes, and got 'em down. 'Cure's beginning,' says the captain. 'Mutton chop and pickles.' I shut my eyes, and got *them* down. 'Broiled ham and cayenne pepper,' says the captain. 'Glass of stout and cranberry tart. Want to go on deck again?' 'No, sir,' says I. 'Cure's done,' says the captain. 'Never you give in to your stomach, and your stomach will end in giving in to *you*.'

Having stated the moral purpose of his story in those unanswerable words, John Want took himself and his saucepan into the kitchen. A moment later Crayford returned to the hut, and astonished Frank Aldersley by an unexpected question.

"Have you anything in your berth, Frank, that you set a value on?"

Frank looked puzzled.

"Nothing that I set the smallest value on—when I am out of it," he replied. "What does your question mean?"

"We are almost as short of fuel as we are of

provisions," Crayford proceeded. "Your berth will make good firing. I have directed Bateson to be here in ten minutes with his axe."

"Very attentive and considerate on your part," said Frank. "What is to become of me, if you please, when Bateson has chopped my bed into firewood?"

"Can't you guess?"

"I suppose the cold has stupefied me. The riddle is beyond my reading. Suppose you give me a hint?"

"Certainly. There will be beds to spare soon—there is to be a change at last in our wretched lives here. Do you see it now?"

Frank's eyes sparkled. He sprang out of his berth and waved his fur cap in triumph.

"See it?" he exclaimed; "of course I do! The exploring party is to start at last. Do I go with the expedition?"

"It is not very long since you were in the doctor's hands, Frank," said Crayford, kindly. "I doubt if you are strong enough yet to make one of the exploring party."

"Strong enough or not," returned Frank, "any risk is better than pining and perishing here. Put me down, Crayford, among those who volunteer to go."

"Volunteers will not be accepted in this case," said Crayford. "Captain Holding and Captain Ebsworth see serious objections, as we are situated, to that method of proceeding."

"Do they mean to keep the appointments in their own hands?" asked Frank. "I, for one, object to that."

"Wait a little," said Crayford. "You were playing backgammon the other day with one of the officers. Does the board belong to him or to you?"

"It belongs to me. I have got it in my locker here. What do you want with it?"

"I want the dice and the box, for casting lots. The captains have arranged—most wisely, as I think—that Chance shall decide among us who goes with the expedition, and who stays behind in the huts. The officers and crew of the 'Wanderer' will be here in a few minutes to cast the lots. Neither you nor any one can object to that way of settling the question. Officers and men alike take their chance together. Nobody can grumble."

"I am quite satisfied," said Frank. "But I know of one man among the officers who is sure to make objections."

"Who is the man?"

"You know him well enough too. The 'Bear of the Expedition,'—Richard Wardour."

"Frank! Frank! you have a bad habit of letting your tongue run away with you. Don't repeat that stupid nickname when you talk of my good friend, Richard Wardour."

"Your good friend? Crayford! your liking for that man amazes me."

Crayford laid his hand kindly on Frank's shoul-

der. Of all the officers of the "Sea-Mew," Crayford's favourite was Frank.

"Why should it amaze you?" he asked. "What opportunities have *you* had of judging? You and Wardour have always belonged to different ships. I have never seen you in Wardour's society for five minutes together. How can *you* form a fair estimate of his character?"

"I take the general estimate of his character," Frank answered. "He has got his nickname because he is the most unpopular man in his ship. Nobody likes him—there must be some reason for that."

"There is only one reason for it," Crayford rejoined. "Nobody understands Richard Wardour. I am not talking at random. Remember I sailed from England with him in the 'Wanderer,' and I was only transferred to the 'Sea-Mew' long after we were locked up in the ice. I was Richard Wardour's companion on board ship for months, and I learnt there to do him justice. Under all his outward defects, I tell you there beats a great and generous heart. Suspend your opinion, my lad, until you know my friend as well as I do. No more of this now. Give me the dice and the box."

Frank opened his locker. At the same time, the silence of the snowy waste outside was broken by a shouting of voices hailing the hut—"Sea-Mew, a-hoy!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE sailor on watch opened the outer door. There, plodding over the ghastly white snow, were the officers of the "Wanderer" approaching the hut. There, scattered under the merciless black sky, were the crew, with the dogs and the sledges, waiting the word which was to start them on their perilous and doubtful journey.

Captain Holding, of the "Wanderer," accompanied by his officers, entered the hut—in high spirits at the prospect of a change. Behind them, lounging in slowly by himself, was a dark, sullen, heavy-browed man. He neither spoke nor offered his hand to anybody; he was the one person present who seemed to be perfectly indifferent to the fate in store for him. This was the man whom his brother officers had nicknamed the Bear of the Expedition. In other words—Richard Wardour.

Crayford advanced to welcome Captain Holding. Frank—remembering the friendly reproof which he had just received—passed over the other officers of the Wanderer, and made a special effort to be civil to Crayford's friend.

"Good morning, Mr. Wardour," he said. "We may congratulate each other on the chance of leaving this horrible place."

"You may think it horrible," Wardour retorted. "I like it."

“Like it? Good heavens! why?”

“Because there are no women here.”

Frank turned to his brother officers, without making any further advances in the direction of Richard Wardour. The Bear of the Expedition was more unapproachable than ever.

In the meantime, the hut had become thronged by the able-bodied officers and men of the two ships. Captain Holding, standing in the midst of them, with Crayford by his side, proceeded to explain the purpose of the contemplated expedition to the audience which surrounded him.

He began in these words:—

“Brother officers and men of the ‘Wanderer’ and ‘Sea-Mew,’ it is my duty to tell you, very briefly, the reasons which have decided Captain Ebsworth and myself on despatching an exploring party in search of help. Without recalling all the hardships we have suffered for the last two years—the destruction, first of one of our ships, then of the other; the death of some of our bravest and best companions; the vain battles we have been fighting with the ice and snow, and boundless desolation of these inhospitable regions—without dwelling on these things, it is my duty to remind you that this, the last place in which we have taken refuge, is far beyond the track of any previous expedition, and that consequently our chance of being discovered by any rescuing parties that may be sent to look after us is, to say the least of it, a

chance of the most uncertain kind. You all agree with me, gentlemen, so far?"

The officers (with the exception of Wardour, who stood apart in sullen silence) all agreed, so far.

The Captain went on.

"It is therefore urgently necessary that we should make another, and probably a last, effort to extricate ourselves. The winter is not far off, game is getting scarcer and scarcer, our stock of provisions is running low, and the sick—especially, I am sorry to say, the sick in the 'Wanderer's' hut—are increasing in number day by day. We must look to our own lives, and to the lives of those who are dependent on us, and we have no time to lose."

The officers echoed the words cheerfully.

"Right! right! No time to lose."

Captain Holding resumed:

"The plan proposed is, that a detachment of the able-bodied officers and men among us should set forth this very day, and make another effort to reach the nearest inhabited settlements, from which help and provisions may be despatched to those who remain here. The new direction to be taken and the various precautions to be adopted, are all drawn out ready. The only question now before us is—Who is to stop here, and who is to undertake the journey?"

The officers answered the question with one accord—"Volunteers!"

The men echoed their officers. "Aye, aye, volunteers."

Wardour still preserved his sullen silence. Crayford noticed him, standing apart from the rest, and appealed to him personally.

“Do you say nothing?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Wardour answered. “Go or stay, it’s all one to me.”

“I hope you don’t really mean that?” said Crayford.

“I do.”

“I am sorry to hear it, Wardour.”

Captain Holding answered the general suggestion in favour of volunteering by a question which instantly checked the rising enthusiasm of the meeting.

“Well,” he said, “suppose we say volunteers. Who volunteers to stop in the huts?”

There was a dead silence. The officers and men looked at each other confusedly. The Captain continued.

“You see we can’t settle it by volunteering. You all want to go. Every man among us who has the use of his limbs naturally wants to go. But what is to become of those who have *not* got the use of their limbs? Some of us must stay here and take care of the sick.”

Everybody admitted that this was true.

“So we get back again,” said the Captain, “to the old question—Who among the able-bodied is to go, and who is to stay? Captain Ebsworth says, and I say, let chance decide it. Here are dice.

The numbers run as high as twelve—double sixes. All who throw under six, stay; all who throw over six, go. Officers of the 'Wanderer' and the 'Sea-Mew,' do you agree to that way of meeting the difficulty?"

All the officers agreed—with the one exception of Wardour, who still kept silence.

"Men of the 'Wanderer' and 'Sea-Mew,' your officers agree to cast lots. Do you agree too?"

The men agreed without a dissentient voice. Crayford handed the box and the dice to Captain Holding.

"You throw first, sir. Under six, 'Stay.' Over six, 'Go.'"

Captain Holding cast the dice; the top of the cask serving for a table. He threw seven.

"Go," said Crayford. "I congratulate you, sir. Now for my own chance." He cast the dice in his turn. Three. "Stay! Ah, well! well! if I can do my duty and be of use to others, what does it matter whether I go or stay? Wardour, you are next, in the absence of your first lieutenant."

Wardour prepared to cast without shaking the dice.

"Shake the box, man!" cried Crayford. "Give yourself a chance of luck!"

Wardour persisted in letting the dice fall out carelessly, just as they lay in the box.

"Not I!" he muttered to himself. "I've done with luck." Saying those words, he threw down

the empty box, and seated himself on the nearest chest, without looking to see how the dice had fallen.

Crayford examined them. "Six!" he exclaimed. "There! you have a second chance, in spite of yourself. You are neither under nor over—you throw again."

"Bah!" growled the Bear. "It's not worth the trouble of getting up for. Somebody else throw for me." He suddenly looked at Frank. "You! you have got what the women call a lucky face."

Frank appealed to Crayford. "Shall I?"

"Yes, if he wishes it," said Crayford.

Frank cast the dice. "Five! He stays! Wardour, I am sorry I have thrown against you."

"Go or stay," reiterated Wardour, "it's all one to me. You will be luckier, young one, when you cast for yourself."

Frank cast for himself.

"Eight. Hurrah! I go!"

"What did I tell you?" said Wardour. "The chance was yours. You have thriven on my ill luck."

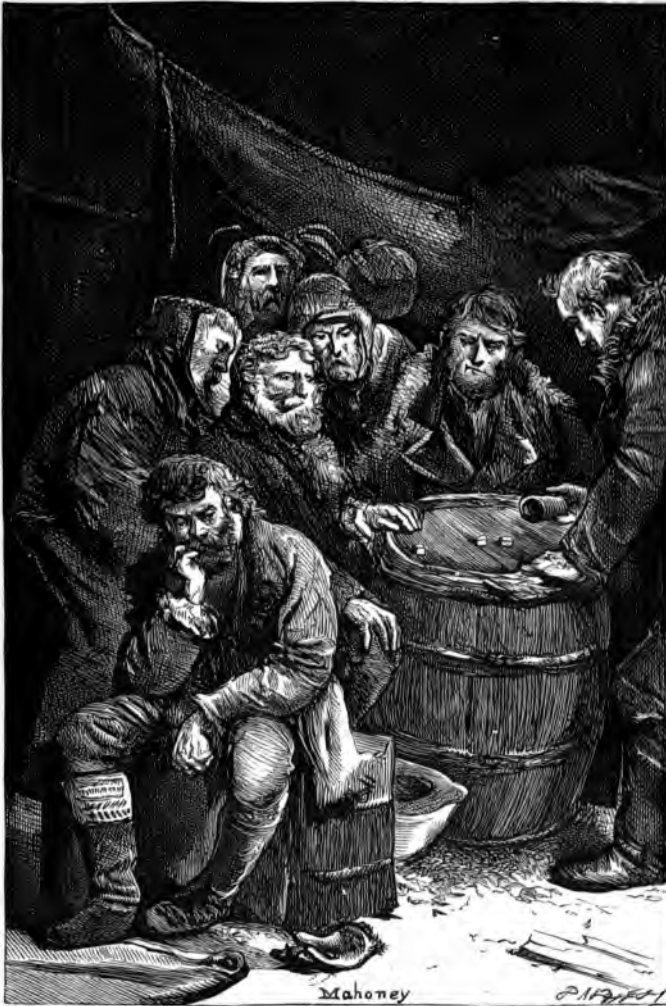
He rose, as he spoke, to leave the hut. Crayford stopped him.

"Have you anything particular to do, Richard?"

"What has anybody to do here?"

"Wait a little, then. I want to speak to you when this business is over."

"Are you going to give me any more good advice?"



"Frank cast the dice. 'Five! He stays! Wardour, I am sorry I have thrown against you.'"—p. 60

“Don’t look at me in that sour way, Richard. I am going to ask you a question about something which concerns yourself.”

Wardour yielded without a word more. He returned to his chest, and cynically composed himself to slumber. The casting of the lots went on rapidly among the officers and men. In another half hour chance had decided the question of “Go” or “Stay” for all alike. The men left the hut. The officers entered the inner apartment for a last conference with the bed-ridden captain of the “Sea-Mew.” Wardour and Crayford were left together, alone.

CHAPTER IX.

CRAYFORD touched his friend on the shoulder to rouse him. Wardour looked up, impatiently, with a frown.

“I was just asleep,” he said. “Why do you wake me?”

“Look round you, Richard. We are alone.”

“Well—and what of that?”

“I wish to speak to you privately, and this is my opportunity. You have disappointed and surprised me to-day. Why did you say it was all one to you whether you went or stayed? Why are you the only man among us who seems to be perfectly indifferent whether we are rescued or not?”

"Can a man always give a reason for what is strange in his manner or his words?" Wardour retorted.

"He can try," said Crayford quietly, "when his friend asks him."

Wardour's manner softened.

"That's true," he said. "I *will* try. Do you remember the first night at sea, when we sailed from England in the 'Wanderer?'"

"As well as if it was yesterday."

"A calm, still night," the other went on, thoughtfully. "No clouds, no stars. Nothing in the sky but the broad moon, and hardly a ripple to break the path of light she made in the quiet water. Mine was the middle watch that night. You came on deck, and found me alone——"

He stopped. Crayford took his hand, and finished the sentence for him.

"Alone—and in tears."

"The last I shall ever shed," Wardour added bitterly.

"Don't say that. There are times when a man is to be pitied, indeed, if he can shed no tears. Go on, Richard."

Wardour proceeded—still following the old recollections, still preserving his gentler tones.

"I should have quarrelled with any other man who had surprised me at that moment," he said. "There was something, I suppose, in your voice, when you asked my pardon for disturbing me,

that softened my heart. I told you I had met with a disappointment which had broken me for life. There was no need to explain further. The only hopeless wretchedness in this world is the wretchedness that women cause."

"And the only unalloyed happiness," said Crayford, "the happiness that women bring."

"That may be your experience of them," Wardour answered. "Mine is different. All the devotion, the patience, the humility, the worship that there is in man I laid at the feet of a woman. She accepted the offering as women do—accepted it easily, gracefully, unfeelingly—accepted it as a matter of course. I left England to win a high place in my profession before I dared to win *her*. I braved danger and faced death. I staked my life in the fever-swamps of Africa to gain the promotion that I only desired for her sake—and gained it. I came back to give her all, and to ask nothing in return but to rest my weary heart in the sunshine of her smile. And her own lips—the lips I had kissed at parting—told me that another man had robbed me of her. I spoke but few words when I heard that confession, and left her for ever. 'The time may come,' I told her, 'when I shall forgive *you*. But the man who has robbed me of you shall rue the day when you and he first met.' Don't ask me who he was! I have yet to discover him. The treachery had been kept secret; nobody could tell me where to find

him ; nobody could tell me who he was. What did it matter ? When I had lived out the first agony, I could rely on myself—I could be patient and bide my time.”

“Your time ? What time ?”

“The time when I and that man shall meet, face to face. I knew it then ; I know it now—it was written on my heart then, it is written on my heart now—we two shall meet and know each other ! With that conviction strong within me, I volunteered for this service, as I would have volunteered for anything that set work and hardship and danger, like ramparts, between my misery and me. With that conviction strong within me still, I tell you it is no matter whether I stay here with the sick or go hence with the strong. I shall live till I have met that man ! There is a day of reckoning appointed between us. Here in the freezing cold, or away in the deadly heat—in battle or in shipwreck—in the face of starvation, under the shadow of pestilence—I, though hundreds are falling round me, I shall live ! live for the coming of one day ! live for the meeting with one man !”

He stopped, trembling, body and soul, under the hold that his own terrible superstition had fastened on him, Crayford drew back in silent horror. Wardour noticed the action—he resented it—he appealed in defence of his one cherished conviction to Crayford’s own experience of him.

"Look at me!" he cried. "Look how I have lived and thriven, with the heartache gnawing at me at home, and the winds of the icy north whistling round me here! I am the strongest man among you. Why? I have fought through hardships that have laid the best-seasoned men of all our party on their backs. Why? What have I done, that my life should throb as bravely through every vein in my body at this minute, and in this deadly place, as ever it did in the wholesome breezes of home? What am I preserved for? I tell you again, for the coming of one day—for the meeting with one man."

He paused once more. This time Crayford spoke.

"Richard!" he said, "since we first met I have believed in your better nature, against all outward appearance. I have believed in you firmly, truly, as your brother might. You are putting that belief to a hard test. If your enemy had told me that you had ever talked as you talk now, that you had ever looked as you look now, I would have turned my back on him as the utterer of a vile calumny against a just, a brave, an upright man. Oh! my friend, my friend, if ever I have deserved well of you, put away those thoughts from your heart! Face me again with the stainless look of a man who has trampled under his feet the bloody superstitions of revenge, and knows them no more! Never, never, let the time come when I cannot offer you my hand as I offer it now

—to the man I can still admire, to the brother I can still love !”

The heart that no other voice could touch felt that appeal. The fierce eyes, the hard voice, softened under Crayford’s influence. Richard Wardour’s head sank on his breast.

“ You are kinder to me than I deserve,” he said. “ Be kinder still, and forget what I have been talking about. No ! no more about me ; I am not worth it. We’ll change the subject, and never go back to it again. Let’s do something. Work, Crayford—that’s the true elixir of *our* life ! Work, that stretches the muscles and sets the blood a-glowing. Work, that tires the body and rests the mind. Is there nothing in hand that I can do ? Nothing to cut ? Nothing to carry ?”

The door opened as he put the question. Bateson—appointed to chop Frank’s bed-place into firing—appeared punctually with his axe. Wardour, without a word of warning, snatched the axe out of the man’s hand.

“ What was this wanted for ?” he asked.

“ To cut up Mr. Aldersley’s berth there into firing, sir.”

“ I’ll do it for you ! I’ll have it down in no time !” He turned to Crayford. “ You needn’t be afraid about me, old friend. I am going to do the right thing. I am going to tire my body and rest my mind.”

The evil spirit in him was plainly subdued—for

the time at least. Crayford took his hand in silence, and then (followed by Bateson) left him to his work.

CHAPTER X.

AXE in hand, Wardour approached Frank's bed-place.

"If I could only cut the thoughts out of me," he said to himself, "as I am going to cut the billets out of this wood!" He attacked the bed-place with the axe like a man who well knew the use of his instrument. "Oh, me," he thought, sadly, "if I had only been born a carpenter instead of a gentleman! A good axe, Master Bateson—I wonder where you got it? Something like a grip, my man, on this handle. Poor Crayford! his words stick in my throat. A fine fellow! a noble fellow! No use thinking, no use regretting; what is said is said. Work! work! work!"

Plank after plank fell out on the floor. He laughed over the easy task of destruction. "Aha! young Aldersley! It doesn't take much to demolish your bedplace. I'll have it down! I would have the whole hut down, if they would only give me the chance of chopping at it!"

A long strip of wood fell to his axe—long enough to require cutting in two. He turned it, and stooped over it. Something caught his eye—letters carved in the wood. He looked closer.

The letters were very faintly and badly cut. He could only make out the first three of them ; and, even of those, he was not quite certain. They looked like C. L. A.—if they looked like anything. He threw down the strip of wood irritably.

“Damn the fellow (whoever he is) who cut this ! Why should he carve *that* name, of all the names in the world ?”

He paused, considering—then determined to go on again with his self-imposed labour. He was ashamed of his own outburst. He looked eagerly for the axe. “Work, work ! Nothing for it but work.” He found the axe, and went on again.

He cut out another plank.

He stopped, and looked at it suspiciously.

There was carving again on this plank. The letters F. and A. appeared on it.

He put down the axe. There were vague misgivings in him which he was not able to realise. The state of his own mind was fast becoming a puzzle to him.

“More carving,” he said to himself. “That’s the way these young idlers employ their long hours. F. A. ? Those must be *his* initials—Frank Aldersley. Who carved the letters on the other plank ? Frank Aldersley, too ?”

He turned the piece of wood in his hand nearer to the light, and looked lower down it. More carving again, lower down ! Under the initials F. A. were two more letters—C. B.

"C. B.?" he repeated to himself. "His sweetheart's initials, I suppose! Of course—at his age—his sweetheart's initials."

He paused once more. A spasm of inner pain showed the shadow of its mysterious passage outwardly on his face.

"*Her* cypher is C. B.," he said, in low broken tones. "C. B.—Clara Burnham."

He waited, with the plank in his hand; repeating the name over and over again, as if it was a question he was putting to himself.

"Clara Burnham? Clara Burnham?"

He dropped the plank and turned deadly pale in a moment. His eyes wandered furtively backwards and forwards between the strip of wood on the floor and the half-demolished berth. "O God! what has come to me now?" he said to himself, in a whisper. He snatched up the axe with a strange cry—something between rage and terror. He tried—fiercely, desperately tried—to go on with his work. No! strong as he was, he could not use the axe. His hands were helpless; they trembled incessantly. He went to the fire; he held his hands over it. They still trembled incessantly; they infected the rest of him. He shuddered all over. He knew fear. His own thoughts terrified him.

"Crayford!" he cried out. "Crayford! come here, and let's go hunting."

No friendly voice answered him. No friendly

face showed itself at the door. An interval passed, and there came over him another change. He recovered his self-possession almost as suddenly as he had lost it. A smile—a horrid, deforming, unnatural smile—spread slowly, stealthily, devilishly over his face. He left the fire; he put the axe away softly in a corner; he sat down in his old place, deliberately self-abandoned to a frenzy of vindictive joy. He had found the man! There, at the end of the world—there, at the last fight of the Arctic voyagers against starvation and death—he had found the man!

The minutes passed.

He became conscious, on a sudden, of a freezing stream of air pouring into the room.

He turned, and saw Crayford opening the door of the hut. An officer was behind him. Wardour rose eagerly and looked over Crayford's shoulder.

Was it—could it be—the man who had carved the letters on the plank? Yes! Frank Aldersley!

CHAPTER XI.

“STILL at work!” Crayford exclaimed, looking at the half-demolished bed-place. “Give yourself a little rest, Richard. The exploring party is ready to start. If you wish to take leave of your brother officers before they go, you have no time to lose.”

He checked himself there, looking Wardour full in the face.

“Good heavens!” he cried, “how pale you are! Has anything happened?”

Frank—searching in his locker for articles of clothing which he might require on the journey—looked round. He was startled, as Crayford had been startled, by the sudden change in Wardour since they had last seen him.

“Are you ill?” he asked. “I hear you have been doing Bateson’s work for him. Have you hurt yourself?”

Wardour suddenly moved his head, so as to hide his face from both Crayford and Frank. He took out his handkerchief, and wound it clumsily round his left hand.

“Yes,” he said, “I hurt myself with the axe. It’s nothing. Never mind. Pain always has a curious effect on me. I tell you it’s nothing! don’t notice it!”

He turned his face towards them again as suddenly as he had turned it away. He advanced a few steps, and addressed himself with an uneasy familiarity to Frank.

“I didn’t answer you civilly when you spoke to me some little time since. I mean, when I first came in here, along with the rest of them. I apologize. Shake hands! How are you? Ready for the march?”

Frank met the oddly abrupt advance which had been made to him with perfect good humour.

"I am glad to be friends with you, Mr. Wardour. I wish I was as well seasoned to fatigue as you are."

Wardour burst into a hard, joyless, unnatural laugh.

"Not strong, eh? You don't look it. The dice had better have sent me away and kept you here. I never felt in better condition in my life." He paused and added, with his eye on Frank, and with a strong emphasis on the words: "We men of Kent are made of tough material."

Frank advanced a step on his side, with a new interest in Richard Wardour.

"You come from Kent?" he said.

"Yes. From East Kent." He waited a little once more, and looked hard at Frank. "Do you know that part of the country?" he asked.

"I ought to know something about East Kent," Frank answered. "Some dear friends of mine once lived there."

"Friends of yours?" Wardour repeated. "One of the county families, I suppose?"

As he put the question he abruptly looked over his shoulder. He was standing between Crayford and Frank. Crayford, taking no part in the conversation, had been watching him and listening to him more and more attentively as that conversation went on. Within the last moment or two, Wardour had become instinctively conscious of this. He resented Crayford's conduct with needless irritability.

"Why are you staring at me?" he asked.

"Why are you looking unlike yourself?" Crayford answered, quietly.

Wardour made no reply. He renewed the conversation with Frank.

"One of the county families?" he resumed. "The Witherbys of Yew Grange, I daresay?"

"No," said Frank; "but friends of the Witherbys, very likely—the Burnhams."

Desperately as he struggled to maintain it, Wardour's self-control failed him. He started violently. The clumsily-wound handkerchief fell off his hand. Still looking at him attentively, Crayford picked it up.

"There is your handkerchief, Richard," he said. "Strange!"

"What is strange?"

"You told us you had hurt yourself with the axe——"

"Well?"

"There is no blood on your handkerchief."

Wardour snatched the handkerchief out of Crayford's hand, and, turning away, approached the outer door of the hut. "No blood on the handkerchief," he said to himself. "There may be a stain or two when Crayford sees it again." He stopped within a few paces of the door and spoke to Crayford. "You recommended me to take leave of my brother officers before it was too late," he said. "I am going to follow your advice."

The door was opened from the outer side as he laid his hand on the lock.

One of the quartermasters of the "Wanderer" entered the hut.

"Is Captain Holding here, sir?" he asked, addressing himself to Wardour.

Wardour pointed to Crayford.

"The lieutenant will tell you," he said.

Crayford advanced and questioned the quartermaster.

"What do you want with Captain Holding?" he asked.

"I have a report to make, sir. There has been an accident on the ice."

"To one of your men?"

"No, sir. To one of our officers."

Wardour—on the point of going out—paused when the quartermaster made that reply. For a moment he considered with himself. Then he walked slowly back to the part of the room in which Frank was standing. Crayford, directing the quartermaster, pointed to the arched doorway in the side of the hut.

"I am sorry to hear of the accident," he said. "You will find Captain Holding in that room."

For the second time, with singular persistency, Wardour renewed the conversation with Frank.

"So you knew the Burnhams?" he said. "What became of Clara when her father died?"

Frank's face flushed angrily on the instant.

"Clara?" he repeated. "What authorises you to speak of Miss Burnham in that familiar manner?"

Wardour seized the opportunity of quarrelling with him.

"What right have you to ask?" he retorted coarsely.

Frank's blood was up. He forgot his promise to Clara to keep their engagement secret—he forgot everything but the unbridled insolence of Wardour's language and manner.

"A right which I insist on your respecting," he answered. "The right of being engaged to marry her."

Crayford's steady eyes were still on the watch, and Wardour felt them on him. A little more, and Crayford might openly interfere. Even Wardour recognised, for once, the necessity of controlling his temper, cost him what it might. He made his apologies, with overstrained politeness, to Frank.

"Impossible to dispute such a right as yours," he said. "Perhaps you will excuse me when you know that I am one of Miss Burnham's old friends. My father and her father were neighbours. We have always met like brother and sister——"

Frank generously stopped the apology there.

"Say no more," he interposed. "I was in the wrong—I lost my temper. Pray forgive me."

Wardour looked at him with a strange reluctant interest while he was speaking. Wardour asked an extraordinary question when he had done.

"Is she very fond of you?"

Frank burst out laughing.

"My dear fellow!" he said, "come to our wedding, and judge for yourself."

"Come to your wedding?" As he repeated the words Wardour stole one glance at Frank, which Frank (employed in buckling his knapsack) failed to see. Crayford noticed it—and Crayford's blood ran cold. Comparing the words which Wardour had spoken to him while they were alone together, with the words that had just passed in his presence, he could draw but one conclusion. The woman whom Wardour had loved and lost was—Clara Burnham. The man who had robbed him of her was Frank Aldersley. And Wardour had discovered it in the interval since they had last met. "Thank God!" thought Crayford, "the dice have parted them. Frank goes with the Expedition; and Wardour stays behind with me."

The reflection had barely occurred to him—Frank's thoughtless invitation to Wardour had just passed his lips—when the canvas screen over the doorway was drawn aside. Captain Holding and the officers who were to leave with the exploring party, returned to the main room on their way out. Seeing Crayford, Captain Holding stopped to speak to him.

"I have a casualty to report," said the captain, "which diminishes our numbers by one. My second lieutenant, who was to have joined the ex-

ploring party, has had a fall on the ice. Judging by what the quartermaster tells me, I am afraid the poor fellow has broken his leg."

"I will supply his place," cried a voice at the other end of the hut.

Everybody looked round. The man who had spoken was Richard Wardour.

Crayford instantly interfered—so vehemently as to astonish all who heard him.

"No!" he said. "Not you, Richard! not you!"

"Why not?" Wardour asked sternly.

"Why not, indeed?" added Captain Holding. "Wardour is the very man to be useful on a long march. He is in perfect health, and he is the best shot among us. I was on the point of proposing him myself."

Crayford failed to show his customary respect for his superior officer. He openly disputed the Captain's conclusion.

"Wardour has no right to volunteer," he rejoined. "It has been settled, Captain Holding, that chance shall decide who is to go and who is to stay."

"And chance *has* decided it," cried Wardour. "Do you think we are going to cast the dice again, and give an officer of the 'Sea-Mew' a chance of replacing an officer of the 'Wanderer?' There is a vacancy in our party, not in yours; and we claim the right of filling it as we please. I volunteer, and my captain backs me. Whose authority is to keep me here after that?"

"Gently, Wardour," said Captain Holding. "A man who is in the right can afford to speak with moderation." He turned to Crayford. "You must admit yourself," he continued, "that Wardour is right this time. The missing man belongs to my command, and in common justice one of my officers ought to supply his place."

It was impossible to dispute the matter further. The dullest man present could see that the captain's reply was unanswerable. In sheer despair, Crayford took Frank's arm and led him aside a few steps. The last chance left of parting the two men was the chance of appealing to Frank.

"My dear boy," he began, "I want to say one friendly word to you on the subject of your health. I have already, if you remember, expressed my doubts whether you are strong enough to make one of an exploring party. I feel those doubts more strongly than ever at this moment. Will you take the advice of a friend who wishes you well?"

Wardour had followed Crayford. Wardour roughly interposed before Frank could reply.

"Let him alone!"

Crayford paid no heed to the interruption. He was too earnestly bent on withdrawing Frank from the Expedition to notice anything that was said or done by the persons about him.

"Don't, pray don't, risk hardships which you are unfit to bear!" he went on entreatingly. "Your

place can be easily filled. Change your mind, Frank. Stay here with me."

Again Wardour interfered. Again he called out, "Leave him alone!" more roughly than ever. Still deaf and blind to every consideration but one, Crayford pressed his entreaties on Frank.

"You owned yourself just now that you were not well seasoned to fatigue," he persisted. "You feel (you *must* feel) how weak that last illness has left you? You know (I am sure you know) how unfit you are to brave exposure to cold and long marches over the snow."

Irritated beyond endurance by Crayford's obstinacy—seeing, or thinking he saw, signs of yielding in Frank's face—Wardour so far forgot himself as to seize Crayford by the arm, and attempt to drag him away from Frank. Crayford turned and looked at him.

"Richard," he said, very quietly, "you are not yourself. I pity you. Drop your hand."

Wardour relaxed his hold with something of the sullen submission of a wild animal to its keeper. The momentary silence which followed gave Frank an opportunity of speaking at last.

"I am gratefully sensible, Crayford," he began, "of the interest which you take in me——"

"And you will follow my advice?" Crayford interposed eagerly.

"My mind is made up, old friend," Frank answered, firmly and sadly. "Forgive me for disap-

pointing you. I am appointed to the Expedition. With the Expedition I go." He moved nearer to Wardour. In his innocence of all suspicion, he clapped Wardour heartily on the shoulder. "When I feel the fatigue," said poor simple Frank, "you will help me, comrade—won't you? Come along!"

Wardour snatched his gun out of the hands of the sailor who was carrying it for him. His dark face became suddenly irradiated with a terrible joy.

"Come!" he said. "Over the snow and over the ice! Come! where no human footsteps have ever trodden and where no human trace is ever left."

Blindly, instinctively, Crayford made an effort to part them. His brother officers, standing near, pulled him back. They looked at each other anxiously. The merciless cold, striking its victims in various ways, had struck in some instances at their reason first. Everybody loved Crayford. Was he, too, going on the dark way that others had taken before him? They forced him to seat himself on one of the lockers. "Steady, old fellow!" they said kindly—"steady!" Crayford yielded, writhing inwardly under the sense of his own helplessness. What in God's name could he do? Could he denounce Wardour to Captain Holding on bare suspicion—without so much as the shadow of a proof to justify what he said? The captain would decline to insult one of his officers by even mentioning the monstrous accusation to him. The

captain would conclude, as others had already concluded, that Crayford's mind was giving way under stress of cold and privation. No hope—literally, no hope now but in the numbers of the expedition. Officers and men, they all liked Frank. As long as they could stir hand or foot they would help him on the way—they would see that no harm came to him.

The word of command was given ; the door was thrown open ; the hut emptied rapidly. Over the merciless white snow—under the merciless black sky—the exploring party began to move. The sick and helpless men, whose last hope of rescue centred in their departing messmates, cheered faintly. Some few whose days were numbered sobbed and cried like women. Frank's voice faltered as he turned back at the door to say his last words to the friend who had been a father to him.

“God bless you, Crayford!”

Crayford broke away from the officers near him, and, hurrying forward, seized Frank by both hands. Crayford held him as if he would never let him go.

“God preserve you, Frank! I would give all I have in the world to be with you. Good-bye! Good-bye!”

Frank waved his hand—dashed away the tears that were gathering in his eyes—and hurried out. Crayford called after him, the last, the only, warning that he could give :

“While you can stand, keep with the main body, Frank!”

Wardour, waiting till the last—Wardour, following Frank through the snow-drift—stopped, stepped back, and answered Crayford at the door:

“While he can stand, he keeps with Me.”

THIRD SCENE.

THE ICEBERG.

CHAPTER XII.

ALONE! alone on the Frozen Deep!

The Arctic sun is rising dimly in the dreary sky. The beams of the cold northern moon, mingling strangely with the dawning light, clothe the snowy plains in hues of livid grey. An ice-field on the far horizon is moving slowly southward in the spectral light. Nearer, a stream of open water rolls its slow black waves past the edges of the ice. Nearer still, following the drift, an iceberg rears its crags and pinnacles to the sky; here, glittering in the moonbeams; there, looming dim and ghostlike in the ashy light.

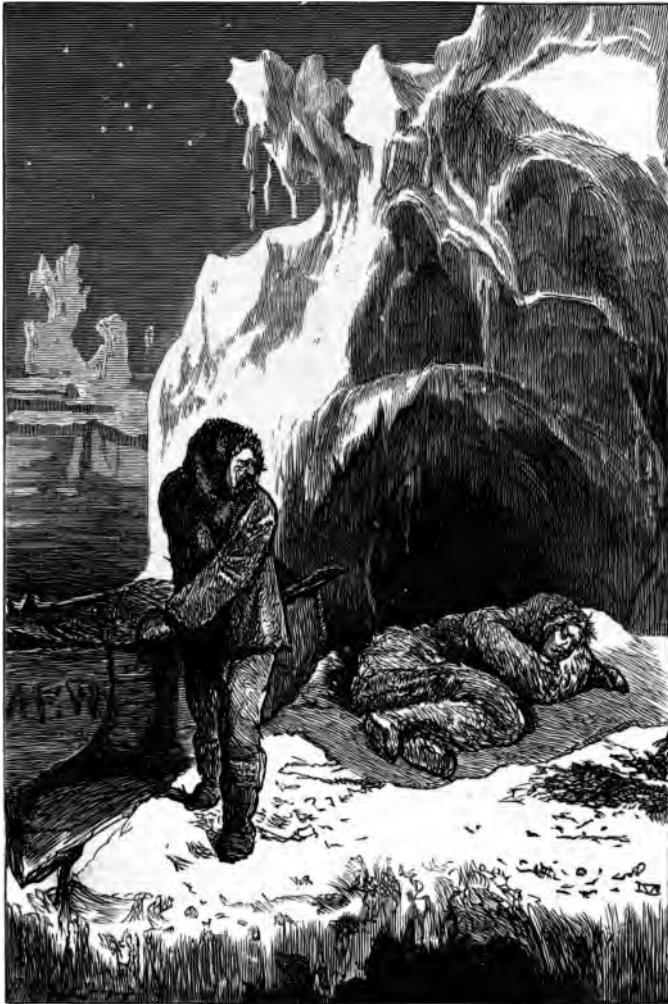
Midway on the long sweep of the lower slope of the iceberg, what objects rise and break the desolate monotony of the scene? In this awful solitude can signs appear which tell of human life? Yes! The black outline of a boat just shows itself, hauled up on the berg. In an ice-cavern behind the boat, the last red embers of a

dying fire flicker from time to time over the figures of two men. One is seated, resting his back against the side of the cavern. The other lies prostrate with his head on his comrade's knee. The first of these men is awake, and thinking. The second reclines, with his still white face turned up to the sky—sleeping or dead. Days and days since, these two have fallen behind on the march of the Expedition of Relief. Days and days since, these two have been given up by their weary and failing companions as doomed and lost. He who sits thinking is Richard Wardour. He who lies sleeping or dead is Frank Aldersley.

The iceberg drifts slowly: over the black water: through the ashy light. Minute by minute the dying fire sinks. Minute by minute the deathly cold creeps nearer and nearer to the lost men.

Richard Wardour rouses himself from his thoughts, looks at the still white face beneath him, and places his hand on Frank's heart. It still beats feebly. Give him his share of the food and fuel still stored in the boat, and Frank may live through it. Leave him neglected where he lies; and his death is a question of hours, perhaps minutes—who knows?

Richard Wardour lifts the sleeper's head and rests it against the cavern side. He goes to the boat and returns with a billet of wood. He stoops to place the wood on the fire, and stops. Frank is dreaming, and murmuring in his dream. A woman's



"And still Richard Wardour waits—waits and thinks."—p. 85

name passes his lips. Frank is in England again—at the ball—whispering to Clara the confession of his love.

Over Richard Wardour's face there passes the shadow of a deadly thought. He rises from the fire; he takes the wood back to the boat. His iron strength is shaken, but it still holds out. They are drifting nearer and nearer to the open sea. He can launch the boat without help; he can take the food and the fuel with him. The sleeper on the iceberg is the man who has robbed him of Clara—who has wrecked the hope and the happiness of his life. Leave the man in his sleep, and let him die!

So the tempter whispers. Richard Wardour tries his strength on the boat. It moves; he has got it under control. He stops, and looks round. Beyond him is the open sea. Beneath him is the man who has robbed him of Clara. The shadow of the deadly thought grows and darkens over his face. He waits with his hands on the boat—waits and thinks.

The iceberg drifts slowly: over the black water: through the ashy light. Minute by minute the dying fire sinks. Minute by minute the deathly cold creeps nearer to the sleeping man. And still Richard Wardour waits—waits and thinks.

FOURTH SCENE.

THE GARDEN.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE spring has come. The air of the April night just lifts the leaves of the sleeping flowers. The moon is queen in the cloudless and starless sky. The stillness of the midnight hour is abroad, over land and over sea.

In a villa on the westward shore of the Isle of Wight, the glass doors which lead from the drawing-room to the garden are yet open. The shaded lamp yet burns on the table. A lady sits by the lamp, reading. From time to time she looks out into the garden, and sees the white-robed figure of a young girl pacing slowly to and fro in the soft brightness of the moonlight on the lawn. Sorrow and suspense have set their mark on the lady. Not rivals only, but friends who formerly admired her, agree now that she looks worn and aged. The more merciful judgment of others remarks, with equal truth, that her eyes, her hair, her simple grace and grandeur of movement have lost but

little of their olden charms. The truth lies, as usual, between the two extremes. In spite of sorrow and suffering, Mrs. Crayford is the beautiful Mrs. Crayford still.

The delicious silence of the hour is softly disturbed by the voice of the younger lady in the garden.

“Go to the piano, Lucy. It is a night for music. Play something that is worthy of the night.”

Mrs. Crayford looks round at the clock on the mantelpiece.

“My dear Clara, it is past twelve! Remember what the doctor told you. You ought to have been in bed an hour ago.”

“Half an hour, Lucy—give me half an hour more! Look at the moonlight on the sea. Is it possible to go to bed on such a night as this? Play something, Lucy—something spiritual and divine.”

Earnestly pleading with her friend, Clara advances towards the window. She too has suffered under the wasting influences of suspense. Her face has lost its youthful freshness; no delicate flush of colour rises on it when she speaks. The soft grey eyes which won Frank's heart in the by-gone time are sadly altered now. In repose they have a dimmed and wearied look. In action they are wild and restless, like eyes suddenly wakened from startling dreams. Robed in white, her soft brown hair hanging loosely over her shoulders, there is something weird and ghostlike in the girl,

as she moves nearer and nearer to the window in the full light of the moon—pleading for music that shall be worthy of the mystery and the beauty of the night.

“Will you come in here if I play to you?” Mrs. Crayford asks. “It is a risk, my love, to be out in the night air.”

“No! no! I like it. Play—while I am out here, looking at the sea. It quiets me; it comforts me; it does me good.”

She glides back, ghostlike, over the lawn. Mrs. Crayford rises and puts down the volume that she has been reading. It is a record of explorations in the Arctic seas. The time has gone by when the two lonely women could take an interest in subjects not connected with their own anxieties. Now, when hope is fast failing them—now, when their last news of the “Wanderer” and the “Sea-Mew” is news that is more than two years old—they can read of nothing, they can think of nothing, but dangers and discoveries, losses and rescues, in the terrible Polar seas.

Unwillingly, Mrs. Crayford puts her book aside and goes to the piano—Mozart’s “Air in A, with Variations,” lies open on the instrument. One after another she plays the lovely melodies, so simply, so purely beautiful, of that unpretending and unrivalled work. At the close of the ninth variation (Clara’s favourite) she pauses, and turns towards the garden.

“ Shall I stop there ? ” she asks.

There is no answer. Has Clara wandered away out of hearing of the music that she loves—the music that harmonises so subtly with the tender beauty of the night ? Mrs. Crayford rises and advances to the window.

No ! there is the white figure standing alone on the slope of the lawn—the head turned away from the house ; the face looking out over the calm sea, whose gently rippling waters end in the dim line on the horizon, which is the line of the Hampshire coast.

Mrs. Crayford advances as far as the path before the window and calls to her.

“ Clara ! ”

Again there is no answer. The white figure still stands immovably in its place.

With signs of distress in her face, but with no appearance of alarm, Mrs. Crayford returns to the room. Her own sad experience tells her what has happened. She summons the servants, and directs them to wait in the drawing-room until she calls to them. This done, she returns to the garden, and approaches the mysterious figure on the lawn.

Dead to the outer world, as if she lay already in her grave—insensible to touch, insensible to sound, motionless as stone, cold as stone—Clara stands on the moonlit lawn, facing the seaward view. Mrs. Crayford waits at her side, patiently watching for the change which she knows is to come. “ Cata-

lepsy," as some call it—"hysteria," as others say—this alone is certain, the same interval always passes; the same change always appears.

It comes now. Not a change in her eyes; they still remain wide open, fixed, and glassy. The first movement is a movement of her hands. They rise slowly from her side, and waver in the air like the hands of a person groping in the dark. Another interval—and the movement spreads to her lips; they part and tremble. A few minutes more, and words begin to drop, one by one, from those parted lips—words spoken in a lost vacant tone, as if she is talking in her sleep.

Mrs. Crayford looks back at the house. Sad experience makes her suspicious of the servants' curiosity. Sad experience has long since warned her that the servants are not to be trusted within hearing of the wild words which Clara speaks in the trance. Has any one of them ventured into the garden? No. They are out of hearing at the window, waiting for the signal which tells them that their help is needed.

Turning towards Clara once more, Mrs. Crayford hears the vacantly-uttered words falling faster and faster from her lips.

"Frank! Frank! Frank! Don't drop behind—don't trust Richard Wardour. While you can stand, keep with the other men, Frank!"

(The farewell warning of Crayford in the solitudes of the Frozen Deep, repeated by Clara in the garden of her English home!)

A moment of silence follows, and in that moment the vision has changed. She sees him on the iceberg now, at the mercy of the bitterest enemy he has on earth. She sees him drifting: over the black water: through the ashy light.

"Wake, Frank! wake and defend yourself! Richard Wardour knows that I love you. Richard Wardour's vengeance will take your life! Wake, Frank—wake! You are drifting to your death!" A low groan of horror bursts from her, sinister and terrible to hear. "Drifting! drifting!" she whispers to herself; "drifting to his death!"

Her glassy eyes suddenly soften, then close. A long shudder runs through her. A faint flush shows itself on the deadly pallor of her face, and fades again. Her limbs fail her. She sinks into Mrs. Crayford's arms.

The servants, answering the call for help, carry her into the house. They lay her insensible on her bed. After an hour or more, her eyes open again—this time with the light of life in them—open, and rest languidly on her friend sitting by the bedside.

"I have had a dreadful dream," she murmurs faintly. "Am I ill, Lucy? I feel so weak."

Even as she says the words sleep, gentle natural sleep, takes her suddenly, as it takes young children weary with their play. Though it is all over now, though no further watching is required, Mrs. Crayford still keeps her place by the bedside, too anxious and too wakeful to retire to her own room.

On other occasions, she is accustomed to dismiss from her mind the words which drop from Clara in the trance. This time the effort to dismiss them is beyond her power. The words haunt her. Vainly she recalls to memory all that the doctors have said to her in speaking of Clara in the state of trance. "What she vaguely dreads for the lost man whom she loves, is mingled in her mind with what she is constantly reading of trials, dangers, and escapes in the Arctic Seas. The most startling things that she may say or do are all attributable to this cause, and may be explained in this way." So the doctors have spoken; and, thus far, Mrs. Crayford has shared their view. It is only to-night, that the girl's words ring in her ear with a strange prophetic sound in them. It is only to-night that she asks herself: "Is Clara present, in the spirit, with our loved and lost ones in the lonely North? Can mortal vision see the dead and living in the solitudes of the Frozen Deep?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE night had passed.

Far and near, the garden-view looked its gayest and brightest in the light of the noonday sun. The cheering sounds which tell of life and action were audible all round the villa. From the garden of the nearest house rose the voices of children at play.

Along the road at the back sounded the roll of wheels, as carts and carriages passed at intervals. Out on the blue sea the distant splash of the paddles, the distant thump of the engines, told from time to time of the passage of steamers, entering or leaving the strait between the island and the mainland. In the trees the birds sang gaily among the rustling leaves. In the house the women-servants were laughing over some jest or story that cheered them at their work: It was a lively and pleasant time—a bright enjoyable day.

The two ladies were out together, resting on a garden seat, after a walk round the grounds.

They exchanged a few trivial words relating to the beauty of the day, and then said no more. Possessing the same consciousness of what she had seen in the trance which persons in general possess of what they have seen in a dream—believing in the vision as a supernatural revelation—Clara's worst forebodings were now, to her mind, realised as truths. Her last faint hope of ever seeing Frank again was now at an end. Intimate experience of her told Mrs. Crayford what was passing in Clara's mind, and warned her that the attempt to reason and remonstrate would be little better than a voluntary waste of words and time. The disposition which she had herself felt, on the previous night, to attach a superstitious importance to the words that Clara had spoken in the trance had vanished with the return of the morning. Rest

and reflection had quieted her mind, and had restored the composing influence of her-sober sense. Sympathising with Clara in all besides, she had no sympathy, as they sat together in the pleasant sunshine, with Clara's gloomy despair of the future. She who could still hope, had nothing to say to the sad companion who had done with hope. So the quiet minutes succeeded each other, and the two friends sat side by side in silence.

An hour passed—and the gate-bell of the villa rang.

They both started—they both knew the ring. It was the hour when the postman brought their newspapers from London. In past days, what hundreds on hundreds of times they had torn off the cover which enclosed the newspaper, and looked at the same column with the same weary mingling of hope and despair! There to-day—as it was yesterday; as it would be, if they lived, to-morrow—there was the servant with Lucy's newspaper and Clara's newspaper in his hand! Would both of them do again to-day what both of them had done so often in the days that were gone?

No! Mrs. Crayford removed the cover from her newspaper as usual. Clara laid *her* newspaper aside, unopened, on the garden seat.

In silence Mrs. Crayford looked where she always looked, at the column devoted to the Latest Intelligence from foreign parts. The instant her eye fell on the page she started with a loud cry of joy

The newspaper fell from her trembling hand. She caught Clara in her arms. "Oh, my darling! my darling! news of them at last."

Without answering, without the slightest change in look or manner, Clara took the newspaper from the ground, and read the top line in the column, printed in capital letters.

THE ARCTIC EXPEDITION.

She waited, and looked at Mrs. Crayford.

"Can you bear to hear it, Lucy," she asked, "if I read it aloud?"

Mrs. Crayford was too agitated to answer in words. She signed impatiently to Clara to go on.

Clara read the news which followed the heading in capital letters. Thus it ran:

"The following intelligence from St. John's, Newfoundland, has reached us for publication. The whaling vessel 'Blythewood' is reported to have met with the surviving officers and men of the Expedition in Davis Strait. Many are stated to be dead, and some are supposed to be missing. The list of the saved, as collected by the people of the whaler, is not vouched for, as being absolutely correct, the circumstances having been adverse to investigation. The vessel was pressed for time; and the members of the Expedition, all more or less suffering from exhaustion, were not in a position to give the necessary assistance to inquiry. Further particulars may be looked for by the next mail."

The list of the survivors followed, beginning with the officers in the order of their rank. They both read the list together. The first name was Captain Holding. The second was Lieutenant Crayford.

There, the wife's joy overpowered her. After a pause, she put her arm round Clara's waist, and spoke to her.

"Oh, my love!" she murmured, "are you as happy as I am? Is Frank's name there too? The tears are in my eyes. Read for me—I can't read for myself."

The answer came, in still sad tones:

"I have read as far as your husband's name. I have no need to read farther."

Mrs. Crayford dashed the tears from her eyes, steadied herself, and looked at the newspaper.

On the list of the survivors the search was vain. Frank's name was not among them. On a second list, headed "Dead or Missing," the two first names that appeared were:

FRANCIS ALDERSLEY.

RICHARD WARDOUR.

In speechless distress and dismay Mrs. Crayford looked at Clara. Had she strength enough, in her feeble health, to sustain the shock that had fallen on her? Yes! She bore it with a strange unnatural resignation; she looked, she spoke, with the sad self-possession of despair.

"I was prepared for it," she said. "I saw them

in the spirit last night. Richard Wardour has discovered the truth, and Frank has paid the penalty with his life—and I, I alone, am to blame.” She shuddered, and put her hand on her heart. “We shall not long be parted, Lucy; I shall go to him. He will not return to me.”

Those words were spoken with a calm certainty of conviction that was terrible to see. “I have no more to say,” she added, after a moment, and rose to return to the house. Mrs. Crayford caught her by the hand, and forced her to take her seat again.

“Don’t look at me, don’t speak to me, in that horrible manner!” she exclaimed. “Clara, it is unworthy of a reasonable being, it is doubting the mercy of God, to say what you have just said. Look at the newspaper again. See! They tell you plainly that their information is not to be depended upon—they warn you to wait for further particulars. The very words at the top of the list prove how little they know of the truth. ‘Dead or missing!’ On their own showing it is quite as likely that Frank is missing as that Frank is dead. For all you know, the next mail may bring a letter from him. Are you listening to me?”

“Yes.”

“Can you deny what I say?”

“No.”

“‘Yes!’ ‘No!’ Is that the way to answer me when I am so distressed and so anxious about you?”

"I am sorry I spoke as I did, Lucy. We look at some subjects in very different ways. I don't dispute, dear, that yours is the reasonable view."

"You don't dispute?" retorted Mrs. Crayford, warmly. "No! you do what is worse—you believe in your own opinion—you persist in your own conclusion—with the newspaper before you! Do you, or do you not, believe the newspaper?"

"I believe in what I saw last night."

"In what you saw last night! You, an educated woman, a clever woman, believing in a vision of your own fancy—a mere dream! I wonder you are not ashamed to acknowledge it!"

"Call it a dream if you like, Lucy. I have had other dreams, at other times, and I have known them to be fulfilled."

"Yes!" said Mrs. Crayford. "For once in a way they may have been fulfilled, by chance—and you notice it, and remember it, and pin your faith on it. Come, Clara, be honest! What about the occasions when the chance has been against you, and your dreams have *not* been fulfilled? You superstitious people are all alike. You conveniently forget when your dreams and your presentiments prove false. For my sake, dear, if not for your own," she continued, in gentler and tenderer tones, "try to be more reasonable and more hopeful. Don't lose your trust in the future and your trust in God. God, who has saved my husband, can save Frank. While there is doubt there is hope

Don't embitter my happiness, Clara! Try to think as I think—if it is only to show that you love me.”

She put her arm round the girl's neck and kissed her. Clara returned the kiss; Clara answered sadly and submissively:

“ I do love you, Lucy. I *will* try.”

Having answered in those terms, she sighed to herself, and said no more. It would have been plain, only too plain, to far less observant eyes than Mrs. Crayford's that no salutary impression had been produced on her. She had ceased to defend her own way of thinking, she spoke of it no more; but there was the terrible conviction of Frank's death at Wardour's hands rooted as firmly as ever in her mind! Discouraged and distressed, Mrs. Crayford left her, and walked back towards the house.

CHAPTER XV.

At the drawing-room window of the villa there appeared a polite little man, with bright intelligent eyes and cheerful sociable manners. Neatly dressed in professional black, he stood, self-proclaimed, a prosperous country doctor—successful and popular in a wide circle of patients and friends. As Mrs. Crayford approached him, he stepped out briskly to meet her on the lawn, with both hands extended in courteous and cordial greeting.

"My dear madam, accept my heartfelt congratulations!" cried the doctor. "I have seen the good news in the paper; and I could hardly feel more rejoiced than I do now, if I had the honour of knowing Lieutenant Crayford personally. We mean to celebrate the occasion at home. I said to my wife before I came out, 'A bottle of the old Madeira at dinner to-day, mind!—to drink the Lieutenant's health; God bless him!' And how is our interesting patient? The news is not altogether what we could wish, so far as she is concerned. I felt a little anxious, to tell you the truth, about the effect of it; and I have paid my visit to-day before the usual time. Not that I take a gloomy view of the news myself. No! There is clearly a doubt about the correctness of the information, so far as Mr. Aldersley is concerned—and that is a point, a great point, in Mr. Aldersley's favour. I give him the benefit of the doubt, as the lawyers say. Does Miss Burnham give him the benefit of the doubt too? I hardly dare hope it, I confess."

"Miss Burnham has grieved and alarmed me," Mrs. Crayford answered. "I was just thinking of sending for you, when we met here."

With those introductory words, she told the doctor exactly what had happened; repeating, not only the conversation of that morning between Clara and herself, but also the words which had fallen from Clara in the trance of the past night.

The doctor listened attentively. Little by little, its easy smiling composure vanished from his face as Mrs. Crayford went on, and left him completely transformed into a grave and thoughtful man.

"Let us go and look at her," he said.

He seated himself by Clara's side, and carefully studied her face, with his hand on her pulse. There was no sympathy here, between the dreamy mystical temperament of the patient and the downright practical character of the doctor. Clara secretly disliked her medical attendant. She submitted impatiently to the close investigation of which he made her the object. He questioned her, and she answered irritably. Advancing a step further (the doctor was not easily discouraged) he adverted to the news of the Expedition, and took up the tone of remonstrance which had been already adopted by Mrs. Crayford. Clara declined to discuss the question. She rose with formal politeness, and requested permission to return to the house. The doctor attempted no further resistance. "By all means, Miss Burnham," he answered, resignedly—having first cast a look at Mrs. Crayford which said plainly, "Stay here with me." Clara bowed her acknowledgments in cold silence, and left them together. The doctor's bright eyes followed the girl's wasted, yet still graceful, figure, as it slowly receded from view, with an expression of grave anxiety, which Mrs. Crayford noticed with grave misgiving on her side.

He said nothing until Clara had disappeared under the verandah which ran round the garden-side of the house.

"I think you told me," he began, "that Miss Burnham has neither father nor mother living?"

"Yes. Miss Burnham is an orphan."

"Has she any near relatives?"

"No. You may speak to me as her guardian and her friend. Are you alarmed about her?"

"I am seriously alarmed. It is only two days since I called here last—and I see a marked change in her for the worse. Physically and morally a change for the worse. Don't needlessly alarm yourself! The case is not, I trust, entirely beyond the reach of remedy. The great hope for us is the hope that Mr. Aldersley may still be living. In that event, I should feel no misgivings about the future. Her marriage would make a healthy and a happy woman of her. But, as things are, I own I dread that settled conviction in her mind that Mr. Aldersley is dead, and that her own death is soon to follow. In her present state of health, that idea (haunting her, as it certainly will, night and day) will have its influence on her body as well as on her mind. Unless we can check the mischief, her last reserves of strength will give way. If you wish for other advice by all means send for it. You have my opinion."

"I am quite satisfied with your opinion," Mrs. Crayford replied. "It is your advice I want. For God's sake tell me what we can do?"

"We can try a complete change," said the doctor. "We can remove her at once from this place."

"She will refuse to leave it," Mrs. Crayford rejoined. "I have more than once proposed a change to her—and she always says No."

The doctor paused for a moment, like a man collecting his thoughts.

"I heard something on my way here," he proceeded, "which suggests to my mind a method of meeting the difficulty that you have just mentioned. Unless I am entirely mistaken, Miss Burnham will not say No to the change that I have in view for her."

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Crayford, eagerly.

"Pardon me if I ask you a question, on my part, before I reply," said the doctor. "Are you fortunate enough to possess any interest at the Admiralty?"

"Certainly. My father is in the Secretary's office—and two of the Lords of the Admiralty are friends of his."

"Excellent! Now I can speak out plainly with little fear of disappointing you. After what I have said, you will agree with me that the only change in Miss Burnham's life which will be of any use to her, is a change that will alter the present tone of her mind on the subject of Mr. Aldersley. Place her in a position to discover—not by reference to her own distempered fancies and visions, but by reference to actual evidence and actual

fact—whether Mr. Aldersley is, or is not, a living man ; and there will be an end of the hysterical delusions which now threaten to fatally undermine her health. Even taking matters at their worst—even assuming that Mr. Aldersley has died in the Arctic seas—it will be less injurious to her to discover this positively, than to leave her mind to feed on its own morbid superstitions and speculations, for weeks and weeks together, while the next news from the Expedition is on its way to England. In one word, I want you to be in a position, before the week is out, to put Miss Burnham's present convictions to a practical test. Suppose you could say to her:—‘We differ, my dear, about Mr. Francis Aldersley. You declare, without the shadow of a reason for it, that he is certainly dead, and, worse still, that he has died by the act of one of his brother officers. I assert, on the authority of the newspaper, that nothing of the sort has happened, and that the chances are all in favour of his being still a living man. What do you say to crossing the Atlantic, and deciding which of us is right—you or I?’ Do you think Miss Burnham will say No to *that*, Mrs. Crayford? If I know anything of human nature, she will seize the opportunity as a means of converting you to a belief in the Second Sight.”

“ Good heavens, doctor! do you mean to tell me that we are to go out and meet the Arctic Expedition on its way home?”

"Admirably guessed, Mrs. Crayford! That is exactly what I mean."

"But how is it to be done?"

"I will tell you immediately. I mentioned—didn't I?—that I had heard something on my road to this house?"

"Yes?"

"Well, I met an old friend at my own gate, who walked with me a part of the way here. Last night my friend dined with the Admiral at Portsmouth. Among the guests, there was a member of the Ministry, who had brought the news about the Expedition with him from London. This gentleman told the company there was very little doubt that the Admiralty would immediately send out a steam-vessel, to meet the rescued men on the shores of America, and bring them home. Wait a little, Mrs. Crayford! Nobody knows, as yet, under what rules and regulations the vessel will sail. Under somewhat similar circumstances, privileged people *have* been received as passengers, or rather as guests, in Her Majesty's ships—and what has been conceded on former occasions may, by bare possibility, be conceded now. I can say no more. If you are not afraid of the voyage for yourself, I am not afraid of it (nay, I am all in favour of it on medical grounds) for my patient. What do you say? Will you write to your father, and ask him to try what his interest will do with his friends at the Admiralty?"

Mrs. Crayford rose excitedly to her feet.

"Write!" she exclaimed. "I will do better than write. The journey to London is no great matter—and my housekeeper here is to be trusted to take care of Clara in my absence. I will see my father to-night! He shall make good use of his interest at the Admiralty—you may rely on that. Oh, my dear doctor, what a prospect it is! My husband! Clara! What a discovery you have made—what a treasure you are! How can I thank you?"

"Compose yourself, my dear madam. Don't make too sure of success. We may consider Miss Burnham's objections as disposed of beforehand. But suppose the Lords of the Admiralty say No?"

"In that case I shall be in London, doctor; and I shall go to them myself. Lords are only men—and men are not in the habit of saying No to *me*?"

So they parted.

In a week from that day Her Majesty's ship *Amazon* sailed for North America. Certain privileged persons, specially interested in the Arctic voyagers, were permitted to occupy the empty state-rooms on board. On the list of these favoured guests of the ship were the names of two ladies—Mrs. Crayford and Miss Burnham.

FIFTH SCENE.

THE BOAT-HOUSE.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE more the open sea—the sea whose waters break on the shores of Newfoundland! An English steamship lies at anchor in the offing. The vessel is plainly visible through the open doorway of a large boat-house on the shore; one of the buildings attached to a fishing-station on the coast of the island.

The only person in the boat-house at this moment, is a man in the dress of a sailor. He is seated on a chest, with a piece of cord in his hand, looking out idly at the sea. On the rough carpenter's table near him lies a strange object to be left in such a place—a woman's veil.

What is the vessel lying at anchor in the offing?

The vessel is the *Amazon*—despatched from England to receive the surviving officers and men of the Arctic Expedition. The meeting has been successfully effected, on the shores of North

America, three days since. But the homeward voyage has been delayed by a storm which has driven the ship out of her course. Taking advantage, on the third day, of the first returning calm, the commander of the *Amazon* has anchored off the coast of Newfoundland, and has sent ashore to increase his supplies of water before he sails for England. The weary passengers have landed for a few hours, to refresh themselves after the discomforts of the tempest. Among them are the two ladies. The veil left on the table in the boat-house is Clara's veil.

And who is the man sitting on the chest, with the cord in his hand, looking out idly at the sea? The man is the only cheerful person in the ship's company. In other words—John Want.

Still reposing on the chest, our friend who never grumbles, is surprised by the sudden appearance of a sailor at the boat-house door.

"Look sharp with your work, there, John Want!" says the sailor; "Lieutenant Crayford is just coming to look after you."

With this warning the messenger disappears again. John Want rises with a groan—turns the chest up on one end—and begins to fasten the cord round it. The ship's cook is not a man to look back on his rescue with the feeling of unmitigated satisfaction which animates his companions in trouble. On the contrary, he is ungratefully disposed to regret the North Pole.

“If I had only known”—thus runs the train of thought in the mind of John Want—“if I had only known, before I was rescued, that I was to be brought to this place, I believe I should have preferred staying at the North Pole. I was very happy keeping up everybody’s spirits at the North Pole. Taking one thing with another, I think I must have been very comfortable at the North Pole—if I had only known it. Another man in my place might be inclined to say that this Newfoundland boat-house was rather a sloppy, slimy, draughty, fishy sort of a habitation to take shelter in. Another man might object to perpetual Newfoundland fogs, perpetual Newfoundland codfish, and perpetual Newfoundland dogs. We had some very nice bears at the North Pole. Never mind! it’s all one to me—I don’t grumble.”

“Have you done cording that box?”

This time the voice is a voice of authority—the man at the doorway is Lieutenant Crayford himself. John Want answers his officer in his own cheerful way.

“I’ve done it as well as I can, sir—but the damp of this place is beginning to tell upon our very ropes. I say nothing about our lungs—I only say our ropes.”

Crayford answers sharply. He seems to have lost his former relish for the humour of John Want.

“Pooh! To look at your wry face, one would think that our rescue from the Arctic regions was

a downright misfortune. You deserve to be sent back again."

"I could be just as cheerful as ever, sir, if I *was* sent back again. I hope I'm thankful; but I don't like to hear the North Pole run down in such a fishy place as this. It was very dry and snowy at the North Pole—and it's very damp and sandy here. Do you never miss your bone soup, sir? *I* do. It mightn't have been strong; but it was very hot; and the cold seemed to give it a kind of a meaty flavour as it went down. Was it you that was a-coughing so long, last night, sir? I don't presume to say anything against the air of these latitudes—but I should be glad to know it wasn't you that was a-coughing so hollow. Would you be so obliging as just to feel the state of these ropes with the ends of your fingers, sir? You can dry them afterwards on the back of my jacket."

"You ought to have a stick laid on the back of your jacket. Take that box down to the boat directly. You croaking vagabond! You would have grumbled in the Garden of Eden."

The philosopher of the Expedition was not a man to be silenced by referring him to the Garden of Eden. Paradise itself was not perfect to John Want.

"I hope I could be cheerful anywhere, sir," said the ship's cook. "But you mark my words—there must have been a deal of troublesome work with the flower-beds in the Garden of Eden,"

Having entered that unanswerable protest, John Want shouldered the box, and drifted drearily out of the boat-house.

Left by himself, Crayford looked at his watch, and called to a sailor outside.

"Where are the ladies?" he asked.

"Mrs. Crayford is coming this way, sir. She was just behind you when you came in."

"Is Miss Burnham with her?"

"No, sir; Miss Burnham is down on the beach with the passengers. I heard the young lady asking after you, sir."

"Asking after me?" Crayford considered with himself, as he repeated the words. He added, in lower and graver tones, "You had better tell Miss Burnham you have seen me here."

The man made his salute and went out. Crayford took a turn in the boat-house.

Rescued from death in the Arctic wastes, and reunited to a beautiful wife, the lieutenant looked, nevertheless, unaccountably anxious and depressed. What could he be thinking of? He was thinking of Clara.

On the first day when the rescued men were received on board the "Amazon," Clara had embarrassed and distressed, not Crayford only, but the other officers of the Expedition as well, by the manner in which she questioned them on the subject of Francis Aldersley and Richard Wardour. She had shown no signs of dismay or despair when

she heard that no news had been received of the two missing men. She had even smiled sadly to herself, when Crayford (out of compassionate regard for her, declared that he and his comrades had not given up the hope of seeing Frank and Wardour yet. It was only when the lieutenant had expressed himself in those terms—and when he had apparently succeeded in dismissing the painful subject—that Clara had startled every one present by announcing that she had something to say in relation to Richard and Frank, which had not been said yet. Though she spoke guardedly, her next words revealed suspicions of foul play lurking in her mind—exactly reflecting similar suspicions lurking in Crayford's mind—which so distressed the lieutenant, and so surprised his comrades, as to render them quite incapable of answering her. The warnings of the storm which shortly afterwards broke over the vessel, were then visible in sea and sky. Crayford made them his excuse for abruptly leaving the cabin in which the conversation had taken place. His brother officers, profiting by his example, pleaded their duties on deck, and followed him out.

On the next day, and the next, the tempest still raged, and the passengers were not able to leave their state-rooms. But now, when the weather had moderated and the ship had anchored—now, when officers and passengers alike were on shore, with leisure time at their disposal—Clara had op-

portunities of returning to the subject of the lost men, and of asking questions in relation to them, which would make it impossible for Crayford to plead an excuse for not answering her. How was he to meet those questions? How could he still keep her in ignorance of the truth?

These were the reflections which now troubled Crayford, and which presented him, after his rescue, in the strangely inappropriate character of a depressed and anxious man. His brother officers, as he well knew, looked to him to take the chief responsibility. If he declined to accept it, he would instantly confirm the horrible suspicion in Clara's mind. The emergency must be met; but how to meet it—at once honourably and mercifully—was more than Crayford could tell. He was still lost in his own gloomy thoughts, when his wife entered the boat-house. Turning to look at her, he saw his own perturbations and anxieties plainly reflected in Mrs. Crayford's face.

"Have you seen anything of Clara?" he asked. "Is she still on the beach?"

"She is following me to this place," Mrs. Crayford replied. "I have been speaking to her this morning. She is just as resolute as ever to insist on your telling her of the circumstances under which Frank is missing. As things are, you have no alternative but to answer her."

"Help me to answer her, Lucy. Tell me, before she comes in, how this horrible suspicion first took

possession of her. All she could possibly have known, when we left England, was that the two men were appointed to separate ships. What could have led her to suspect that they had come together?"

"She was firmly persuaded, William, that they *would* come together, when the Expedition left England. And she had read in books of Arctic travel, of men left behind by their comrades on the march, and of men adrift on icebergs. With her mind full of these images and forebodings, she saw Frank and Wardour (or dreamed of them) in one of her attacks of trance. I was by her side—I heard what she said at the time. She warned Frank that Wardour had discovered the truth. She called out to him, 'While you can stand, keep with the other men, Frank!——'"

"Good God!" cried Crayford; "I warned him myself, almost in those very words, the last time I saw him."

"Don't acknowledge it, William! Keep her in ignorance of what you have just told me; she will not take it for what it is—a startling coincidence, and nothing more. She will accept it as positive confirmation of the faith, the miserable superstitious faith, that is in her. So long as you don't actually know that Frank is dead, and that he has died by Wardour's hand, deny what she says—mislead her for her own sake—dispute all her conclusions as I dispute them. Help me to raise her to the better

and nobler belief in the mercy of God!" She stopped and looked round nervously at the doorway. "Hush!" she whispered; "do as I have told you. Clara is here."

CHAPTER XVII.

CLARA stopped at the doorway, looking backwards and forwards distrustfully between the husband and wife. Entering the boat-house, and approaching Crayford, she took his arm and led him away a few steps from the place in which Mrs. Crayford was standing.

"There is no storm now, and there are no duties to be done on board the ship," she said, with a faint sad smile which it wrung Crayford's heart to see. "You are Lucy's husband, and you have an interest in me for Lucy's sake. Don't shrink on that account from giving me pain: I can bear pain. Friend and brother, will you believe that I have courage enough to hear the worst? Will you promise not to deceive me about Frank?"

The gentle resignation in her voice, the sad pleading in her look, shook Crayford's self-possession at the outset. He answered her in the worst possible manner—he answered evasively.

"My dear Clara," he said, "what have I done that you should suspect me of deceiving you?"

She looked him searchingly in the face—then glanced with renewed distrust at Mrs. Crayford

There was a moment of silence. Before any of the three could speak again, they were interrupted by the appearance of one of Crayford's brother officers, followed by two sailors carrying a hamper between them. Crayford instantly dropped Clara's arm, and seized the welcome opportunity of speaking of other things.

"Any instructions from the ship, Steventon?" he asked, approaching the officer.

"Verbal instructions only," Steventon replied. "The ship will sail with the flood tide. We shall fire a gun to collect the people, and send another boat ashore. In the meantime here are some refreshments for the passengers. The vessel is in a state of confusion; the ladies will eat their lunch more comfortably here."

Hearing this, Mrs. Crayford took *her* opportunity of silencing Clara next.

"Come, my dear," she said, "let us lay the cloth and put the lunch on the table before the gentlemen come in."

Clara was too seriously bent on attaining the object which she had in view, to be silenced in that way. "I will help you directly," she answered—then crossed the room and addressed herself to the officer whose name was Steventon.

"Can you spare me a few minutes?" she asked. "I have something to say to you."

"I am entirely at your service, Miss Burnham."

Answering in those words, Steventon dismissed

the two sailors. Mrs. Crayford looked anxiously at her husband. Crayford whispered to her, "Don't be alarmed about Steventon. I have cautioned him; I believe he is to be depended on."

Clara beckoned to Crayford to return to her.

"I will not keep you long," she said; "I will promise not to distress Mr. Steventon. Young as I am, you shall both find that I am capable of self-control. I won't ask you to go back to the story of your past sufferings; I only want to be sure that I am right about one thing—I mean about what happened at the time when the exploring party was despatched in search of help. As I understand it, you cast lots among yourselves who was to go with the party, and who was to remain behind. Frank cast the lot to go." She paused, shuddering. "And Richard Wardour," she went on, "cast the lot to remain behind. On your honour, as officers and gentlemen, is this the truth?"

"On my honour," Crayford answered, "it is the truth."

"On my honour," Steventon repeated, "it is the truth."

She looked at them, carefully considering her next words before she spoke again.

"You both drew the lot to stay in the huts," she said, addressing Crayford and Steventon, "and you are both here. Richard Wardour drew the lot to stay, and Richard Wardour is not here. How does his name come to be with Frank's on the list of the missing?"

The question was a dangerous one to answer. Steventon left it to Crayford to reply. Once again he answered evasively.

"It doesn't follow, my dear," he said, "that the two men were missing together, because their names happen to come together on the list."

Clara instantly drew the inevitable conclusion from that ill-considered reply.

"Frank is missing from the party of relief," she said. "Am I to understand that Wardour is missing from the huts?"

Both Crayford and Steventon hesitated. Mrs. Crayford cast an indignant look at them, and told the necessary lie without a moment's hesitation!

"Yes!" she said. "Wardour is missing from the huts."

Quickly as she had spoken, she had still spoken too late. Clara had noticed the momentary hesitation on the part of the two officers. She turned to Steventon.

"I trust to your honour," she said quietly. "Am I right, or wrong, in believing that Mrs. Crayford is mistaken?"

She had addressed herself to the right man of the two. Steventon had no wife present to exercise authority over him. Steventon, put on his honour and fairly forced to say something, owned the truth. Wardour had replaced an officer whom accident had disabled from accompanying the party of relief; and Wardour and Frank were missing together.

Clara looked at Mrs. Crayford.

"You hear?" she said. "It is you who are mistaken; not I. What you call 'accident'—what I call 'fate'—brought Richard Wardour and Frank together as members of the same Expedition after all." Without waiting for a reply, she again turned to Steventon, and surprised him by changing the painful subject of the conversation of her own accord.

"Have you been in the Highlands of Scotland?" she asked.

"I have never been in the Highlands," Steventon replied.

"Have you ever read, in books about the Highlands, of such a thing as 'The Second Sight?'"

"Yes."

"Do you believe in the Second Sight?"

Steventon politely declined to commit himself to a direct reply.

"I don't know what I might have done if I had ever been in the Highlands," he said. "As it is, I have had no opportunities of giving the subject any serious consideration."

"I won't put your credulity to the test," Clara proceeded. "I won't ask you to believe anything more extraordinary than that I had a strange dream in England not very long since. My dream showed me what you have just acknowledged—and more than that. How did the two missing men come to be parted from their companions?"

Were they lost by pure accident? or were they deliberately left behind on the march?"

Crayford made a last vain effort to check her enquiries at the point which they had now reached.

"Neither Steventon nor I were members of the party of relief," he said. "How are we to answer you?"

"Your brother officers who *were* members of the party must have told you what happened," Clara rejoined. "I only ask you and Mr. Steventon to tell me what they told you."

Mrs. Crayford interposed again—with a practical suggestion this time.

"The luncheon is not unpacked yet," she said. "Come, Clara! this is our business, and the time is passing."

"The luncheon can wait a few minutes longer," Clara answered. "Bear with my obstinacy," she went on, laying her hand caressingly on Crayford's shoulder. "Tell me how those two came to be separated from the rest. You have always been the kindest of friends; don't begin to be cruel to me now!"

The tone in which she made her entreaty to Crayford went straight to the sailor's heart. He gave up the hopeless struggle; he let her see a glimpse of the truth.

"On the third day out," he said, "Frank's strength failed him. He fell behind the rest from fatigue."

"Surely they waited for him?"

"It was a serious risk to wait for him, my child. Their lives, and the lives of the men they had left in the huts, depended, in that dreadful climate, on their pushing on. But Frank was a favourite. They waited half a day to give Frank the chance of recovering his strength."

There he stopped. There, the imprudence into which his fondness for Clara had led him showed itself plainly, and closed his lips.

It was too late to take refuge in silence. Clara was determined on hearing more.

She questioned Steventon next.

"Did Frank go on again after the half-day's rest?" she asked.

"He tried to go on——"

"And failed?"

"Yes."

"What did the men do when he failed? Did they turn cowards? Did they desert Frank?"

She had purposely used language which might irritate Steventon into answering her plainly. He was a young man; he fell into the snare that she had set for him.

"Not one among them was a coward, Miss Burnham!" he replied, warmly. "You are speaking cruelly and unjustly of as brave a set of fellows as ever lived. The strongest man among them set the example: he volunteered to stay by Frank and to bring him on in the track of the exploring party."

There Steventon stopped, conscious, on his side, that he had said too much. Would she ask him who this volunteer was? No. She went straight on to the most embarrassing question that she had put yet—referring to the volunteer, as if Steventon had already mentioned his name.

“What made Richard Wardour so ready to risk his life for Frank’s sake?” she said to Crayford. “Did he do it out of friendship for Frank? Surely you can tell me that? Carry your memory back to the days when you were all living in the huts. Were Frank and Wardour friends at that time? Did you never hear any angry words pass between them?”

There Mrs. Crayford saw her opportunity of giving her husband a timely hint.

“My dear child!” she said. “How can you expect him to remember that? There must have been plenty of quarrels among the men, all shut up together, and all weary of each other’s company, no doubt.”

“Plenty of quarrels!” Crayford repeated—“and every one of them made up again.”

“And every one of them made up again,” Mrs. Crayford reiterated, in her turn. “There! a plainer answer than that you can’t wish to have. *Now* are you satisfied? Mr. Steventon, come and lend a hand (as you say at sea) with the hamper—Clara won’t help me. William! Don’t stand there doing nothing. This hamper holds a great deal; we must

have a division of labour. Your division shall be laying the tablecloth. Don't handle it in that clumsy way! You unfold a tablecloth as if you were unfurling a sail. Put the knives on the right, and the forks on the left, and the napkin and bread between them. Clara! if you are not hungry in this fine air, you ought to be. Come and do your duty—come and have some lunch."

She looked up as she spoke. Clara appeared to have yielded at last to the conspiracy to keep her in the dark. She had returned slowly to the boat-house doorway; and she was standing alone on the threshold, looking out. Approaching her to lead her to the luncheon-table, Mrs. Crayford could hear that she was speaking softly to herself. She was repeating the farewell words which Richard Wardour had spoken to her at the ball.

" 'A time may come when I shall forgive *you*. But the man who has robbed me of you shall rue the day when you and he first met.' Oh, Frank! Frank! does Richard still live—with your blood on his conscience, and my image in his heart?"

Her lips suddenly closed. She started, and drew back from the doorway, trembling violently. Mrs. Crayford looked out at the quiet seaward view.

"Anything there that frightens you, my dear?" she asked. "I can see nothing—except the boats drawn up on the beach."

"I can see nothing either, Lucy."

"And yet, you are trembling as if there was something dreadful in the view from this door."

"There *is* something dreadful! I feel it—though I see nothing. I feel it—nearer and nearer in the empty air, darker and darker in the sunny light. I don't know what it is. Take me away. No. Not out on the beach. I can't pass the door. Somewhere else! somewhere else!"

Mrs. Crayford looked round her, and noticed a second door at the inner end of the boat-house. She spoke to her husband.

"See where that door leads to, William."

Crayford opened the door: It led into a desolate enclosure—half garden, half yard. Some nets, stretched on poles, were hanging up to dry. No other objects were visible—not a living creature appeared in the place. "It doesn't look very inviting, my dear," said Mrs. Crayford. "I am at your service, however. What do you say?"

She offered her arm to Clara as she spoke. Clara refused it. She took Crayford's arm, and clung to him.

"I'm frightened, dreadfully frightened!" she said to him, faintly. "*You* keep with me—a woman is no protection; I want to be with *you*." She looked round again at the boat-house doorway. "Oh!" she whispered, "I'm cold all over—I'm frozen with fear of this place. Come into the yard! Come into the yard!"

"Leave her to me," said Crayford to his wife. "I will call you, if she doesn't get better in the open air."

He took her out at once, and closed the yard door behind them.

"Mr. Steventon! do you understand this?" asked Mrs. Crayford. "What can she possibly be frightened of?"

She put the question, still looking mechanically at the door by which her husband and Clara had gone out. Receiving no reply, she glanced round at Steventon. He was standing on the opposite side of the luncheon-table, with his eyes fixed attentively on the view from the main doorway of the boat-house. Mrs. Crayford looked where Steventon was looking. This time, there was something visible. She saw the shadow of a human figure projected on the stretch of smooth yellow sand in front of the boat-house.

In a moment more, the figure appeared. A man came slowly into view, and stopped on the threshold of the door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE man was a sinister and terrible object to look at. His eyes glared like the eyes of a wild animal; his head was bare; his long grey hair was torn and tangled; his miserable garments hung about him in rags. He stood in the doorway, a speechless

figure of misery and want, staring at the well-spread table like a hungry dog.

Steventon spoke to him.

"Who are you?"

He answered in a hollow voice:

"A starving man."

He advanced a few steps—slowly and painfully, as if he was sinking under fatigue.

"Throw me some bones from the table," he said. "Give me my share along with the dogs."

There was madness as well as hunger in his eyes while he spoke those words. Steventon placed Mrs. Crayford behind him, so that he might be easily able to protect her in case of need, and beckoned to two sailors who were passing the door of the boat-house at the time.

"Give the man some bread and meat," he said, "and wait near him."

The outcast seized on the bread and meat with lean long-nailed hands that looked like claws. After the first mouthful of food he stopped, considered vacantly with himself, and broke the bread and meat into two portions. One portion he put into an old canvas wallet that hung over his shoulder. The other he devoured voraciously. Steventon questioned him.

"Where do you come from?"

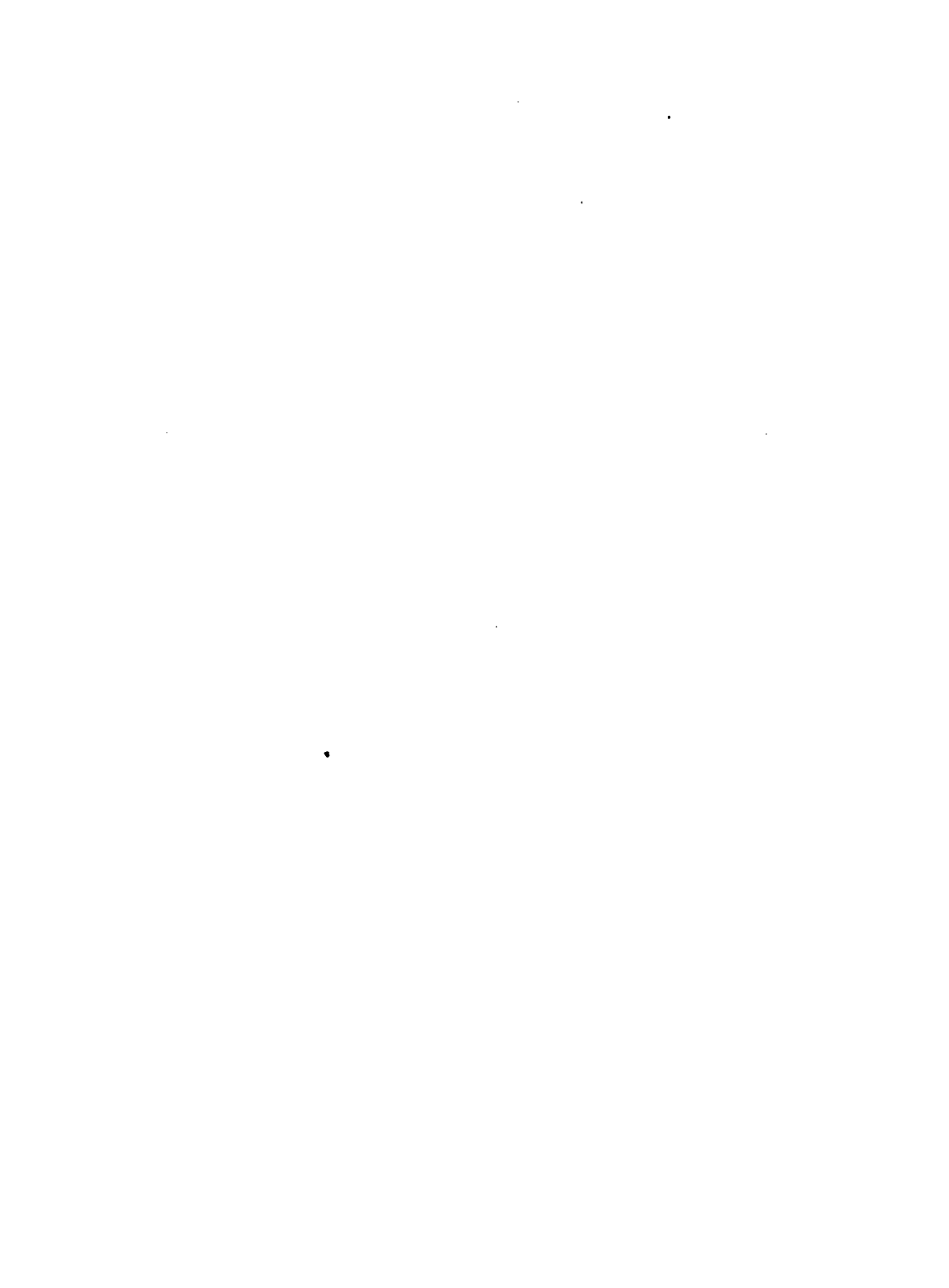
"From the sea."

"Wrecked?"

"Yes."



"I throw me some bones from the table," he said. "Give me my share along with the dogs!"—p. 126



Steventon turned to Mrs. Crayford.

"There may be some truth in the poor wretch's story," he said. "I heard something of a strange boat having been cast on the beach, thirty or forty miles higher up the coast. When were you wrecked, my man?"

The starving creature looked up from his food, and made an effort to collect his thoughts—to exert his memory. It was not to be done. He gave up the attempt in despair. His language, when he spoke, was as wild as his looks.

"I can't tell you," he said. "I can't get the wash of the sea out of my ears. I can't get the shining stars all night, and the burning sun all day, out of my brain. When was I wrecked? When was I first adrift in the boat? When did I get the tiller in my hand and fight against hunger and sleep? When did the gnawing in my breast, and the burning in my head, first begin? I have lost all reckoning of it. I can't think; I can't sleep; I can't get the wash of the sea out of my ears. What are you baiting me with questions for? Let me eat!"

Even the sailors pitied him. The sailors asked leave of their officer to add a little drink to his meal.

"We've got a drop of grog with us, sir, in a bottle. May we give it to him?"

"Certainly!"

He took the bottle fiercely, as he had taken the

food—drank a little—stopped—and considered with himself again. He held up the bottle to the light, and, marking how much liquor it contained, carefully drank half of it only. This done, he put the bottle in his wallet along with the food.

“Are you saving it up for another time?” said Steventon.

“I’m saving it up,” the man answered. “Never mind what for.”

He looked round the boat-house as he made that reply, and noticed Mrs. Crayford for the first time.

“A woman among you!” he said. “Is she English? Is she young? Let me look closer at her.”

He advanced a few steps towards the table.

“Dont be afraid, Mrs. Crayford,” said Steventon.

“I’m not afraid,” Mrs. Crayford replied. “He frightened me at first—he interests me now. Let him speak to me if he wishes it.”

He never spoke. He stood, in dead silence, looking long and anxiously at the beautiful Englishwoman.

“Well?” said Steventon.

He shook his head sadly, and drew back again with a heavy sigh.

“No!” he said to himself, “that’s not *her* face. No! not found yet.”

Mrs. Crayford’s interest was strongly excited. She ventured to speak to him.

“Who is it you want to find?” she asked. “Your wife?”

He shook his head again.

"Who then? What is she like?"

He answered that question in words. His hoarse, hollow voice softened little by little into sorrowful and gentle tones.

"Young," he said; "with a fair, sad face—with kind, tender eyes—with a soft, clear voice. Young, and loving, and merciful. I keep her face in my mind, though I can keep nothing else. I must wander, wander, wander—restless, sleepless, homeless—till I find *her!* Over the ice and over the snow; tossing on the sea, tramping over the land; awake all night, awake all day; wander, wander, wander, till I find *her!*"

He waved his hand with a gesture of farewell, and turned wearily to go out.

At the same moment Crayford opened the yard door.

"I think you had better come to Clara," he began—and checked himself, noticing the stranger. "Who is that?"

The shipwrecked man, hearing another voice in the room, looked round slowly over his shoulder. Struck by his appearance, Crayford advanced a little nearer to him. Mrs. Crayford spoke to her husband as he passed her.

"It's only a poor mad creature, William," she whispered, "shipwrecked and starving."

"Mad?" Crayford repeated, approaching nearer and nearer to the man. "Am *I* in my right

senses?" He suddenly sprang on the outcast, and seized him by the throat. "Richard Wardour!" he cried, in a voice of fury. "Alive! Alive, to answer for Frank!"

The man struggled. Crayford held him.

"Where is Frank?" he said. "You villain, where is Frank?"

The man resisted no longer. He repeated vacantly—

"Villain? and where is Frank?"

As the name escaped his lips, Clara appeared at the open yard door, and hurried into the room.

"I heard Richard's name!" she said. "I heard Frank's name! What does it mean?"

At the sound of her voice the outcast renewed the struggle to free himself, with a sudden frenzy of strength which Crayford was not able to resist. He broke away before the sailors could come to their officer's assistance. Half way down the length of the room he and Clara met one another face to face. A new light sparkled in the poor wretch's eyes; a cry of recognition burst from his lips. He flung one hand up wildly in the air. "Found!" he shouted, and rushed out to the beach before any of the men present could stop him.

Mrs. Crayford put her arms round Clara and held her up. She had not made a movement; she had not spoken a word. The sight of Wardour's face had petrified her.

The minutes passed, and there rose a sudden burst of cheering from the sailors on the beach, near the spot where the fishermen's boats were drawn up. Every man left his work. Every man waved his cap in the air. The passengers, near at hand, caught the infection of enthusiasm, and joined the crew. A moment more, and Richard Wardour appeared again in the doorway, carrying a man in his arms. He staggered, breathless with the effort that he was making, to the place where Clara stood, held up in Mrs. Crayford's arms.

"Saved, Clara!" he cried. "Saved for *you*!"

He released the man, and placed him in Clara's arms.

Frank! Footsore and weary, but living! Saved—saved for *her*! "Now, Clara," cried Mrs. Crayford, "which of us is right? I, who believed in the mercy of God—or you, who believed in a dream?"

She never answered; she clung to Frank in speechless ecstasy. She never even looked at the man who had preserved him—in the first absorbing joy of seeing her lover alive. Step by step, slower and slower, Richard Wardour drew back and left them by themselves.

"I may rest now," he said, faintly. "I may sleep at last. The task is done. The struggle is over."

His last reserves of strength had been given to Frank. He stopped, he staggered, his hands

wavered feebly in search of support. But for one faithful friend, he would have fallen. Crayford caught him. Crayford laid his old comrade gently on some sails strewn in a corner, and pillowed Wardour's weary head on his own breast. The tears streamed over his face. "Richard! Dear Richard!" he said. "Remember—and forgive me."

Richard neither heeded nor heard him. His dim eyes still looked across the room at Clara and Frank.

"I have made *her* happy!" he murmured. "I may lay down my weary head now on the mother earth that hushes all her children to rest at last. Sink, heart! sink, sink to rest! Oh, look at them!" he said to Crayford, with a burst of grief. "They have forgotten *me* already."

It was true! The interest was all with the two lovers. Frank was young, and handsome, and popular. Officers, passengers, and sailors, they all crowded round Frank. They all forgot the martyred man who had saved him—the man who was dying in Crayford's arms.

Crayford tried once more to attract his attention—to win his recognition while there was yet time.

"Richard, speak to me! Speak to your old friend!"

He looked round; he vacantly repeated Crayford's last word.

"Friend?" he said. "My eyes are dim, friend; my mind is dull. I have lost all memories but the memory of *her*. Dead thoughts—all dead thoughts but that one! And yet, you look at me kindly! Why has your face gone down with the wreck of all the rest?"

He paused. His face changed; his thoughts drifted back from present to past. He looked at Crayford vacantly; lost in the terrible remembrances that were rising in him, as the shadows rise with the coming night.

"Hark ye, friend!" he whispered. "Never let Frank know it. There was a time when the fiend within me hungered for his life. I had my hands on the boat. I heard the voice of the Tempter speaking to me: 'Launch it, and leave him to die!' I waited, with my hands on the boat and my eyes on the place where he slept. 'Leave him! leave him!' the Voice whispered. 'Love him!' the lad's voice answered, moaning and murmuring in his sleep. 'Love him, Clara, for helping *me*!' I heard the morning wind come up in the silence over the great deep. Far and near, I heard the groaning of the floating ice, floating, floating, to the clear water and the balmy air. And the wicked Voice floated away with it—away, away, away for ever! 'Love him! love him, Clara, for helping *me*.' No wind could float that away. 'Love him, Clara'——"

His voice sank into silence; his head dropped

on Crayford's breast. Frank saw it. Frank struggled up on his bleeding feet, and parted the friendly throng round him. Frank had not forgotten the man who had saved him.

"Let me go to him!" he cried. "I must, and will, go to him! Clara, come with me."

Clara and Steventon supported him between them. He fell on his knees at Wardour's side; he put his hand on Wardour's bosom.

"Richard!"

The weary eyes opened again. The sinking voice was heard feebly once more.

"Ah! poor Frank. I didn't forget you, Frank, when I came here to beg. I remembered you, lying down outside in the shadow of the boats. I saved you your share of the food and drink. Too weak to get at it now! A little rest, Frank! I shall soon be strong enough to carry you down to the ship."

The end was near. They all saw it now. The men reverently uncovered their heads in the presence of Death. In an agony of despair, Frank appealed to the friends round him.

"Get something to strengthen him, for God's sake! Oh, men! men! I should never have been here but for him! He has given all his strength to my weakness; and now, see how strong I am, and how weak *he* is! Clara! I held by his arm all over the ice and snow. *He* kept watch when I was senseless in the open boat. *His* hand dragged

me out of the waves, when we were wrecked. Speak to him, Clara! speak to him!" His voice failed him, and his head dropped on Wardour's breast.

She spoke, as well as her tears would let her.

"Richard! have you forgotten me?"

He rallied at the sound of that beloved voice. He looked up at her, as she knelt at his head.

"Forgotten you?" Still looking at her, he lifted his hand with an effort, and laid it on Frank. "Should I have been strong enough to save *him*, if I could have forgotten *you*?" He waited a moment, and turned his face feebly towards Crayford. "Stay!" he said. "Some one was here and spoke to me." A faint light of recognition glimmered in his eyes. "Ah, Crayford! I recollect now. Dear Crayford! Come nearer! My mind clears; but my eyes grow dim. You will remember me kindly for Frank's sake? Poor Frank! why does he hide his face? Is he crying? Nearer, Clara—I want to look my last at *you*. My sister Clara! Kiss me, sister, kiss me before I die!"

She stooped and kissed his forehead. A faint smile trembled on his lips. It passed away; and stillness possessed the face—the stillness of Death.

Crayford's voice was heard in the silence.

"The loss is ours," he said. "The gain is his. He has won the greatest of all conquests—the conquest of himself. And he has died in the moment

THE FROZEN DEEP.

of victory. Not one of us here but may live to envy *his* glorious death."

The distant report of a gun came from the ship in the offing, and signalled the return to England and to home.

THE END.

THE DREAM WOMAN:

A MYSTERY IN FOUR NARRATIVES.

[INTRODUCTORY NOTE.—The original version of this story was published, many years since, in "Household Words," and was afterwards printed in the collection of my shorter stories called "The Queen of Hearts." In the present version—written for my public readings in the United States—new characters and new incidents are introduced; and a new beginning and ending have been written. Indeed, the whole complexion of the narrative differs so essentially from the older and shorter version, as to justify me in believing that the reader will find in these pages what is, to all practical intents and purposes, a new story.—W. C.]

PERSONS OF THE MYSTERY.

FRANCIS RAVEN (*Ostler*).
MRS. RAVEN (*His mother*).
MRS. CHANCE (*His aunt*).
PERCY FAIRBANK } (*His master and mistress*).
MRS. FAIRBANK }
JOSEPH RIGOBERT... .. (*His fellow-servant*).
ALICIA WABLOCK... .. (*His wife*).

PERIOD—THE PRESENT TIME.

SCENE—PARTLY IN ENGLAND, PARTLY IN FRANCE.

THE FIRST NARRATIVE.

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF THE FACTS. BY
PERCY FAIRBANK.

I.

“HULLO, there! Ostler! Hullo-o-o!”

“My dear! why don’t you look for the bell?”

“I *have* looked—there is no bell.”

“And nobody in the yard. How very extraordinary! Call again, dear.”

“Ostler! Hullo, there! Ostler-r-r!”

My second call echoes through empty space, and rouses nobody—produces, in short, no visible result. I am at the end of my resources—I don’t know what to say or what to do next. Here I stand in the solitary inn yard of a strange town, with two horses to hold, and a lady to take care of. By way of adding to my responsibilities, it so happens that one of the horses is dead lame, and that the lady is my wife.

Who am I?—you will ask.

There is plenty of time to answer the question.

Nothing happens; and nobody appears to receive us. Let me introduce myself and my wife.

I am Percy Fairbank—English gentleman—age (let us say) forty—no profession—moderate politics—middle height—fair complexion—easy character—plenty of money.

My wife is a French lady. She was Mademoiselle Clotilde Delorge—when I was first presented to her at her father's house in France. I fell in love with her—I really don't know why. It might have been because I was perfectly idle, and had nothing else to do at the time. Or it might have been because all my friends said she was the very last woman whom I ought to think of marrying. On the surface, I must own, there is nothing in common between Mrs. Fairbank and me. She is tall; she is dark; she is nervous, excitable, romantic; in all her opinions she proceeds to extremes. What could such a woman see in me? what could I see in her? I know no more than you do. In some mysterious manner we exactly suit each other. We have been man and wife for ten years, and our only regret is, that we have no children. I don't know what *you* may think; I call that—upon the whole—a happy marriage.

So much for ourselves. The next question is—what has brought us into the inn yard? and why am I obliged to turn groom, and hold the horses?

We live for the most part in France—at the country house in which my wife and I first met.

Occasionally, by way of variety, we pay visits to my friends in England. We are paying one of those visits now. Our host is an old college friend of mine, possessed of a fine estate in Somersetshire; and we have arrived at his house—called Farleigh Hall—towards the close of the hunting-season.

On the day of which I am now writing—destined to be a memorable day in our calendar—the hounds meet at Farleigh Hall. Mrs. Fairbank and I are mounted on two of the best horses in my friend's stables. We are quite unworthy of that distinction; for we know nothing, and care nothing, about hunting. On the other hand, we delight in riding, and we enjoy the breezy spring morning and the fair and fertile English landscape surrounding us on every side. While the hunt prospers, we follow the hunt. But when a check occurs—when time passes and patience is sorely tried; when the bewildered dogs run hither and thither, and strong language falls from the lips of exasperated sportsmen—we fail to take any further interest in the proceedings. We turn our horses' heads in the direction of a grassy lane, delightfully shaded by trees. We trot merrily along the lane, and find ourselves on an open common. We gallop across the common, and follow the windings of a second lane. We cross a brook, we pass through a village, we emerge into pastoral solitude among the hills. The horses toss their heads, and neigh to each other, and enjoy it as much as we do.

The hunt is forgotten. We are as happy as a couple of children; we are actually singing a French song—when in one moment our merriment comes to an end. My wife's horse sets one of his fore-feet on a loose stone, and stumbles. His rider's ready hand saves him from falling. But, at the first attempt he makes to go on, the sad truth shows itself—a tendon is strained; the horse is lame.

What is to be done? We are strangers in a lonely part of the country. Look where we may, we see no signs of a human habitation. There is nothing for it but to take the bridle-road up the hill, and try what we can discover on the other side. I transfer the saddles, and mount my wife on my own horse. He is not used to carry a lady; he misses the familiar pressure of a man's legs on either side of him; he fidgets, and starts, and kicks up the dust. I follow on foot, at a respectful distance from his heels, leading the lame horse. Is there a more miserable object on the face of creation than a lame horse? I have seen lame men and lame dogs who were cheerful creatures; but I never yet saw a lame horse who didn't look heartbroken over his own misfortune.

For half-an-hour my wife capers and curvets sideways along the bridle-road. I trudge on behind her; and the heartbroken horse halts behind *me*. Hard by the top of the hill, our melancholy procession passes a Somersetshire peasant at work

in a field. I summon the man to approach us ; and the man looks at me stolidly, from the middle of the field, without stirring a step. I ask at the top of my voice how far it is to Farleigh Hall. The Somersetshire peasant answers at the top of *his* voice,

“Vourteen mile. Gi’ oi a drap o’ zyder.”

I translate (for my wife’s benefit) from the Somersetshire language into the English language. We are fourteen miles from Farleigh Hall ; and our friend in the field desires to be rewarded for giving us that information, with a drop of cider. There is the peasant, painted by himself ! Quite a bit of character, my dear ! Quite a bit of character !

Mrs. Fairbank doesn’t view the study of agricultural human nature with my relish. Her fidgety horse will not allow her a moment’s repose ; she is beginning to lose her temper.

“We can’t go fourteen miles in this way,” she says. “Where is the nearer inn ? Ask that brute in the field !”

I take a shilling from my pocket and hold it up in the sun. The shilling exercises magnetic virtues. The shilling draws the peasant slowly towards me from the middle of the field. I inform him that we want to put up the horses, and to hire a carriage to take us back to Farleigh Hall. Where can we do that ? The peasant answers (with his eye on the shilling) :—

“At Oonderbridge, to be zure.” (At Underbridge, to be sure.)

“Is it far to Underbridge?”

The peasant repeats, “Var to Oonderbridge?”—and laughs at the question. “Hoo-hoo-hoo!” (Underbridge is evidently close by—if we could only find it.) “Will you show us the way, my man?” “Will you gi’ oi a drap of zyder?” I courteously bend my head, and point to the shilling. The agricultural intelligence exerts itself. The peasant joins our melancholy procession. My wife is a fine woman, but he never once looks at my wife—and, more extraordinary still, he never even looks at the horses. His eyes are with his mind—and his mind is on the shilling.

We reach the top of the hill—and, behold on the other side, nestling in a valley, the shrine of our pilgrimage, the town of Underbridge! Here our guide claims his shilling, and leaves us to find out the inn for ourselves. I am constitutionally a polite man. I say “Good morning” at parting. The guide looks at me with the shilling between his teeth to make sure that it is a good one. “Marnin!” he says savagely—and turns his back on us, as if we had offended him. A curious product, this, of the growth of civilisation. If I didn’t see a church spire at Underbridge, I might suppose that we had lost ourselves on a savage island.

II.

ARRIVING at the town, we have no difficulty in finding the inn. The town is composed of one desolate street; and midway in that street stands the inn—an ancient stone building sadly out of repair. The painting on the signboard is obliterated. The shutters over the long range of front windows are all closed. A cock and his hens are the only living creatures at the door. Plainly, this is one of the old inns of the stage-coach period, ruined by the railway. We pass through the open arched doorway, and find no one to welcome us. We advance into the stable yard behind; I assist my wife to dismount—and there we are in the position already disclosed to view at the opening of this narrative. No bell to ring. No human creature to answer when I call. I stand helpless, with the bridles of the horses in my hand. Mrs. Fairbank saunters gracefully down the length of the yard, and does—what all women do, when they find themselves in a strange place. She opens every door as she passes it, and peeps in. On my side, I have just recovered my breath, I am on the point of shouting for the ostler for the third and last time, when I hear Mrs. Fairbank suddenly call to me.

“Percy! come here!”

Her voice is eager and agitated. She has opened a last door at the end of the yard, and has started

back from some sight which has suddenly met her view. I hitch the horses' bridles on a rusty nail in the wall near me, and join my wife. She has turned pale, and catches me nervously by the arm.

"Good Heavens!" she cries; "look at that!"

I look — and what do I see?

I see a dingy little stable, containing two stalls. In one stall a horse is munching his corn. In the other a man is lying asleep on the litter.

A worn, withered, woe-begone man in an ostler's dress. His hollow wrinkled cheeks, his scanty grizzled hair, his dry yellow skin, tell their own tale of past sorrow or suffering. There is an ominous frown on his eyebrows—there is a painful nervous contraction on one side of his mouth. I hear him breathing convulsively when I first look in; he shudders and sighs in his sleep. It is not a pleasant sight to see, and I turn round instinctively to the bright sunlight in the yard. My wife turns me back again in the direction of the stable-door.

"Wait!" she says. "Wait! he may do it again."

"Do what again?"

"He was talking in his sleep, Percy, when I first looked in. He was dreaming some dreadful dream. Hush! he's beginning again."

I look and listen. The man stirs on his miserable bed. The man speaks, in a quick fierce whisper, through his clenched teeth. "Wake up! Wake up, there! Murder!"



"We both bend over him. He is talking once more in his sleep—strange talk mad talk, this time."— p. 147

There is an interval of silence. He moves one lean arm slowly until it rests over his throat; he shudders, and turns on his straw; he raises his arm from his throat, and feebly stretches it out; his hand clutches at the straw on the side towards which he has turned; he seems to fancy that he is grasping at the edge of something. I see his lips begin to move again; I step softly into the stable; my wife follows me, with her hand fast clasped in mine. We both bend over him. He is talking once more in his sleep—strange talk, mad talk, this time.

“Light grey eyes” (we hear him say), “and a droop in the left eyelid—flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it—all right, mother! fair, white arms with a down on them—little, lady’s hand, with a reddish look round the finger-nails—the knife—the cursed knife—first on one side, then on the other—aha, you she-devil! where is the knife?”

He stops and grows restless on a sudden. We see him writhing on the straw. He throws up both his hands and gasps hysterically for breath. His eyes open suddenly. For a moment they look at nothing, with a vacant glitter in them—then they close again in deeper sleep. Is he dreaming still? Yes; but the dream seems to have taken a new course. When he speaks next, the tone is altered; the words are few—sadly and imploringly repeated over and over again. “Say you love me!

I am so fond of *you*. Say you love me! say you love me!" He sinks into deeper and deeper sleep, faintly repeating those words. They die away on his lips. He speaks no more.

By this time, Mrs. Fairbank has got over her terror. She is devoured by curiosity now. The miserable creature on the straw has appealed to the imaginative side of her character. Her illimitable appetite for romance hungers and thirsts for more. She shakes me impatiently by the arm.

"Do you hear? There is a woman at the bottom of it, Percy! There is love and murder in it, Percy! Where are the people of the inn? Go into the yard, and call to them again."

My wife belongs, on her mother's side, to the South of France. The South of France breeds fine women with hot tempers. I say no more. Married men will understand my position. Single men may need to be told that there are occasions when we must not only love and honour—we must also obey—our wives.

I turn to the door to obey *my* wife, and find myself confronting a stranger who has stolen on us unawares. The stranger is a tiny, sleepy, rosy old man, with a vacant pudding-face, and a shining bald head. He wears drab breeches and gaiters, and a respectable square-tailed ancient black coat. I feel instinctively that here is the landlord of the inn.

"Good morning, sir," says the rosy old man. "I'm a little hard of hearing. Was it you that was a-calling just now in the yard?"

Before I can answer, my wife interposes. She insists (in a shrill voice, adapted to our host's hardness of hearing) on knowing who that unfortunate person is sleeping on the straw? "Where does he come from? Why does he say such dreadful things in his sleep? Is he married or single? Did he ever fall in love with a murderess? What sort of a looking woman was she? Did she really stab him or not? In short, dear Mr. Landlord, tell us the whole story!"

Dear Mr. Landlord waits drowsily until Mrs. Fairbank has quite done—then delivers himself of his reply as follows:—

"His name's Francis Raven. He's an Independent Methodist. He was forty-five year old last birthday. And he's my ostler. That's his story."

My wife's hot Southern temper finds its way to her foot, and expresses itself by a stamp on the stable yard.

The landlord turns himself sleepily round, and looks at the horses. "A fine pair of horses, them two in the yard. Do you want to put 'em up in my stables?" I reply in the affirmative by a nod. The landlord, bent on making himself agreeable to my wife, addresses her once more. "I'm a-going to wake Francis Raven. He's an Independent

Methodist. He was forty-five year old last birthday. And he's my ostler. That's his story."

Having issued this second edition of his interesting narrative, the landlord enters the stable. We follow him, to see how he will wake Francis Raven, and what will happen upon that. The stable broom stands in a corner; the landlord takes it—advances towards the sleeping ostler—and coolly stirs the man up with the broom as if he was a wild beast in a cage. Francis Raven starts to his feet with a cry of terror—looks at us wildly, with a horrid glare of suspicion in his eyes—recovers himself the next moment—and suddenly changes into a decent, quiet, respectable serving-man.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am. I beg your pardon, sir."

The tone and manner in which he makes his apologies are both above his apparent station in life. I begin to catch the infection of Mrs. Fairbank's interest in this man. We both follow him out into the yard, to see what he will do with the horses. The manner in which he lifts the injured leg of the lame horse tells me at once that he understands his business. Quickly and quietly, he leads the animals into an empty stable; quickly and quietly, he gets a bucket of hot water, and puts the lame horse's leg into it. "The warm water will reduce the swelling, sir. I will bandage the leg afterwards." All that he does, is done intelligently; all that he says, he says to the purpose.

Nothing wild, nothing strange about him, now. Is this the same man whom we heard talking in his sleep? the same man who woke with that cry of terror and that horrid suspicion in his eyes? I determine to try him with one or two questions.

III.

"Not much to do here," I say to the ostler.

"Very little to do, sir," the ostler replies.

"Anybody staying in the house?"

"The house is quite empty, sir."

"I thought you were all dead. I could make nobody hear me."

"The landlord is very deaf, sir, and the waiter is out on an errand."

"Yes; and *you* were fast asleep in the stable. Do you often take a nap in the day-time?"

The worn face of the ostler faintly flushes. His eyes look away from my eyes for the first time. Mrs. Fairbank furtively pinches my arm. Are we on the eve of a discovery at last? I repeat my question. The man has no civil alternative but to give me an answer. The answer is given in these words:

"I was tired out, sir. You wouldn't have found me asleep in the daytime but for that."

"Tired out, eh? You had been hard at work, I suppose?"

"No, sir."

"What was it, then?"

He hesitates again, and answers unwillingly, "I was up all night."

"Up all night? Anything going on in the town?"

"Nothing going on, sir."

"Anybody ill?"

"Nobody ill, sir."

That reply is the last. Try as I may, I can extract nothing more from him. He turns away and busies himself in attending to the horse's leg. I leave the stable, to speak to the landlord about the carriage which is to take us back to Farleigh Hall. Mrs. Fairbank remains with the ostler, and favours me with a look at parting. The look says plainly, "*I mean to find out why he was up all night. Leave him to Me.*"

The ordering of the carriage is easily accomplished. The inn possesses one horse and one chaise. The landlord has a story to tell of the horse, and a story to tell of the chaise. They resemble the story of Francis Raven—with this exception, that the horse and chaise belong to no religious persuasion. "The horse will be nine year old next birthday. I've had the shay for four and twenty year. Mr. Max, of Underbridge, he bred the horse; and Mr. Pooley, of Yeovil, he built the shay. It's my horse and my shay. And that's *their* story!" Having relieved his mind of these details, the landlord proceeds to put the harness on the horse. By way of assisting him, I drag the

chaise into the yard. Just as our preparations are completed, Mrs. Fairbank appears. A moment or two later the ostler follows her out. He has bandaged the horse's leg, and is now ready to drive us to Farleigh Hall. I observe signs of agitation in his face and manner, which suggest that my wife has found her way into his confidence. I put the question to her privately in a corner of the yard. "Well? Have you found out why Francis Raven was up all night?"

Mrs. Fairbank has an eye to dramatic effect. Instead of answering plainly, Yes or No, she suspends the interest and excites the audience by putting a question on her side.

"What is the day of the month, dear?"

"The day of the month is the first of March."

"The first of March, Percy, is Francis Raven's birthday."

I try to look as if I was interested—and don't succeed.

"Francis was born," Mrs. Fairbank proceeds gravely, "at two o'clock in the morning."

I begin to wonder whether my wife's intellect is going the way of the landlord's intellect. "Is that all?" I ask.

"It is *not* all," Mrs. Fairbank answers. "Francis Raven sits up on the morning of his birthday, because he is afraid to go to bed."

"And why is he afraid to go to bed?"

"Because he is in peril of his life."

“On his birthday?”

“On his birthday. At two o'clock in the morning. As regularly as the birthday comes round.”

There she stops. Has she discovered no more than that? No more thus far. I begin to feel really interested by this time. I ask eagerly what it means? Mrs. Fairbank points mysteriously to the chaise—with Francis Raven (hitherto our ostler, now our coachman) waiting for us to get in. The chaise has a seat for two in front, and a seat for one behind. My wife casts a warning look at me, and places herself on the seat in front.

The necessary consequence of this arrangement is, that Mrs. Fairbank sits by the side of the driver, during a journey of two hours and more. Need I state the result? It would be an insult to your intelligence to state the result. Let me offer you my place in the chaise. And let Francis Raven tell his terrible story in his own words.

THE SECOND NARRATIVE.

THE OSTLER'S STORY. TOLD BY HIMSELF.

IV.

It is now ten years ago, since I got my first warning of the great trouble of my life, in the Vision of a Dream.

I shall be better able to tell you about it, if you will please suppose yourselves to be drinking tea along with us in our little cottage in Cambridgeshire, ten years since.

The time was the close of day, and there were three of us at the table, namely, my mother, myself, and my mother's sister, Mrs. Chance. These two were Scotchwomen by birth, and both were widows. There was no other resemblance between them that I can call to mind. My mother had lived all her life in England, and had no more of the Scotch brogue on her tongue than I have. My aunt Chance had never been out of Scotland until she came to keep house with my mother after her husband's death. And when *she* opened her lips you heard broad Scotch, I can tell you, if ever you heard it yet!

As it fell out, there was a matter of some consequence in debate among us that evening. It was this: whether I should do well or not to take a long journey on foot the next morning.

Now the next morning happened to be the day before my birthday; and the purpose of the journey was to offer myself for a situation as groom at a great house in the neighbouring county to ours. The place was reported as likely to fall vacant in about three weeks' time. I was as well fitted to fill it as any other man. In the prosperous days of our family, my father had been manager of a training-stable, and he had kept me employed among the horses from my boyhood upward. Please to excuse my troubling you with these small matters. They all fit into my story further on, as you will soon find out.

My poor mother was dead against my leaving home on the morrow.

"You can never walk all the way there and all the way back again by to-morrow night," she says. "The end of it will be that you will sleep away from home on your birthday. You have never done that yet, Francis, since your father's death. I don't like your doing it now. Wait a day longer, my son—only one day."

For my own part, I was weary of being idle, and I couldn't abide the notion of delay. Even one day might make all the difference. Some other man might take time by the forelock, and get the place.

"Consider how long I have been out of work," I says, "and don't ask me to put off the journey. I won't fail you, mother. I'll get back by to-morrow night, if I have to pay my last sixpence for a lift in a cart."

My mother shook her head. "I don't like it, Francis—I don't like it!" There was no moving her from that view. We argued and argued, until we were both at a dead lock. It ended in our agreeing to refer the difference between us to my mother's sister, Mrs. Chance.

While we were trying hard to convince each other, my aunt Chance sat as dumb as a fish, stirring her tea and thinking her own thoughts. When we made our appeal to her, she seemed, as it were, to wake up. "Ye baith refer it to my puir judgment?" she says, in her broad Scotch. We both answered Yes. Upon that my aunt Chance first cleared the tea-table, and then pulled out from the pocket of her gown a pack of cards.

Don't run away, if you please, with the notion that this was done lightly, with a view to amuse my mother and me. My aunt Chance seriously believed that she could look into the future by telling fortunes on the cards. She did nothing herself without first consulting the cards. She could give no more serious proof of her interest in my welfare than the proof which she was offering now. I don't say it profanely; I only mention the fact—the cards had, in some incomprehensible

way, got themselves jumbled up together with her religious convictions. You meet with people nowadays who believe in spirits working by way of tables and chairs. On the same principle (if there *is* any principle in it) my aunt Chance believed in Providence working by way of the cards.

“Whether *you* are right, Francie, or your mither—whether ye will do weel or ill, the morrow, to go or stay—the cairds will tell it. We are a’ in the hands of Providence. The cairds will tell it.”

Hearing this, my mother turned her head aside, with something of a sour look in her face. Her sister’s notions about the cards were little better than flat blasphemy to her mind. But she kept her opinion to herself. My aunt Chance, to own the truth, had inherited, through her late husband, a pension of thirty pounds a year. This was an important contribution to our housekeeping, and we poor relations were bound to treat her with a certain respect. As for myself, if my poor father never did anything else for me before he fell into difficulties, he gave me a good education, and raised me (thank God) above superstitions of all sorts. However, a very little amused me in those days; and I waited to have my fortune told, as patiently as if I believed in it too!

My aunt began her hocus-pocus by throwing out all the cards in the pack under seven. She shuffled the rest, with her left hand for luck; and then she gave them to me to cut. “Wi’ yer left hand,

Francie. Mind that! Pet yer trust in Providence—but dinna forget that yer luck's in yer left hand!" A long and roundabout shifting of the cards followed, reducing them in number, until there were just fifteen of them left, laid out neatly before my aunt in a half circle. The card which happened to lay outermost, at the right-hand end of the circle, was, according to rule in such cases, the card chosen to represent Me. By way of being appropriate to my situation as a poor groom out of work, the card was—the King of Diamonds.

"I tak' up the King o' Diamants," says my aunt. "I count seven cairds fra' richt to left; and I humbly ask a blessing on what follows." My aunt shut her eyes as if she was saying grace before meat, and held up to me the seventh card. I called the seventh card—the Queen of Spades. My aunt opened her eyes again in a hurry, and cast a sly look my way. "The Queen o' Spades means a dairk woman. Ye'll be thinking in secret, Francie, of a dairk woman?"

When a man has been out of place for more than three months, his mind isn't troubled much with thinking of women—light or dark. I was thinking of the groom's place at the great house, and I tried to say so. My aunt Chance wouldn't listen. She treated my interpretation with contempt. "Hoot-toot! there's the caird in your hand! If ye're no thinking of her the day, ye'll be thinking of her the morrow. Where's the harm of thinking

of a dairk woman! I was aince a dairk woman myself, before my hair was grey. Haud yer peace, Francie, and watch the cairds."

I watched the cards as I was told. There were seven left on the table. My aunt removed two from one end of the row and two from the other, and desired me to call the two outermost of the three cards now left on the table. I called the Ace of Clubs and the Ten of Diamonds. My aunt Chance lifted her eyes to the ceiling with a look of devout gratitude which sorely tried my mother's patience. The Ace of Clubs and the Ten of Diamonds, taken together, signified—first, good news (evidently the news of the groom's place!); secondly, a journey that lay before me (pointing plainly to my journey to-morrow!); thirdly and lastly, a sum of money (probably the groom's wages!) waiting to find its way into my pockets. Having told my fortune in these encouraging terms, my aunt declined to carry the experiment any further. "Eh, lad! it's a clean tempting of Proavidence to ask mair o' the cairds than the cairds have tauld us noo. Gae yer ways to-morrow to the great hoose. A dairk woman will meet ye at the gate; and she'll have a hand in getting ye the groom's place, wi' a' the graifications and pairquises appertaining to the same. And, mebbe, when yer poaket's full o' mony, ye'll no' be forgetting yer aunt Chance, maintaining her ain unbleemished widowhood—wi' Proavidence assisting—on thratty punds a year!" |

I promised to remember my aunt Chance (who had the defect, by the way, of being a terribly greedy person after money) on the next happy occasion when my poor empty pockets were to be filled at last. This done, I looked at my mother. She had agreed to take her sister for umpire between us, and her sister had given it in my favour. She raised no more objections. Silently, she got on her feet, and kissed me, and sighed bitterly—and so left the room. My aunt Chance shook her head. “I doubt, Francie, yer puir mither has but a heathen notion of the vairtue of the cairds !”

By daylight the next morning I set forth on my journey. I looked back at the cottage as I opened the garden gate. At one window was my mother, with her handkerchief to her eyes. At the other stood my aunt Chance, holding up the Queen of Spades by way of encouraging me at starting. I waved my hand to both of them in token of farewell, and stepped out briskly into the road. It was then the last day of February. Be pleased to remember, in connection with this, that the first of March was the day, and two o'clock in the morning the hour, of my birth.

V.

Now you know how I came to leave home. The next thing to tell is, what happened on the journey.

I reached the great house in reasonably good

time considering the distance. At the very first trial of it, the prophecy of the cards turned out to be wrong. The person who met me at the lodge gate was not a dark woman—in fact, not a woman at all—but a boy. He directed me on the way to the servants' offices; and there again the cards were all wrong. I encountered, not one woman, but three—and not one of the three was dark. I have stated that I am not superstitious, and I have told the truth. But I must own that I did feel a certain fluttering at the heart when I made my bow to the steward, and told him what business had brought me to the house. His answer completed the discomfiture of aunt Chance's fortune-telling. My ill-luck still pursued me. That very morning another man had applied for the groom's place, and had got it.

I swallowed my disappointment as well as I could, and thanked the steward, and went to the inn in the village to get the rest and food which I sorely needed by this time.

Before starting on my homeward walk I made some enquiries at the inn, and ascertained that I might save a few miles, on my return, by following a new road. Furnished with full instructions, several times repeated, as to the various turnings I was to take, I set forth, and walked on till the evening with only one stoppage for bread and cheese. Just as it was getting towards dark, the rain came on and the wind began to rise; and I

found myself, to make matters worse, in a part of the country with which I was entirely unacquainted, though I guessed myself to be some fifteen miles from home. The first house I found to enquire at, was a lonely roadside inn, standing on the outskirts of a thick wood. Solitary as the place looked, it was welcome to a lost man who was also hungry, thirsty, footsore, and wet. The landlord was civil and respectable-looking; and the price he asked for a bed was reasonable enough. I was grieved to disappoint my mother. But there was no conveyance to be had, and I could go no further afoot that night. My weariness fairly forced me to stop at the inn.

I may say for myself that I am a temperate man. My supper simply consisted of some rashers of bacon, a slice of home-made bread, and a pint of ale. I did not go to bed immediately after this moderate meal, but sat up with the landlord, talking about my bad prospects and my long run of ill-luck, and diverging from these topics to the subjects of horse-flesh and racing. Nothing was said, either by myself, my host, or the few labourers who strayed into the tap-room, which could, in the slightest degree, excite my mind, or set my fancy—which is only a small fancy at the best of times—playing tricks with my common sense.

At a little after eleven the house was closed. I went round with the landlord, and held the

candle while the doors and lower windows were being secured. I noticed with surprise the strength of the bolts, bars, and iron-sheathed shutters.

"You see, we are rather lonely here," says the landlord. "We never have had any attempts to break in yet, but it's always as well to be on the safe side. When nobody is sleeping here, I am the only man in the house. My wife and daughter are timid, and the servant-girl takes after her missuses. Another glass of ale, before you turn in?—No!—Well, how such a sober man as you comes to be out of place is more than I can understand for one.—Here's where you're to sleep. You're the only lodger to-night, and I think you'll say my missus has done her best to make you comfortable. You're quite sure you won't have another glass of ale?—Very well. Good night."

It was half-past eleven by the clock in the passage as we went up-stairs to the bed-room. The window looked out on the wood at the back of the house.

I locked my door, set my candle on the chest of drawers, and wearily got me ready for bed. The bleak wind was still blowing, and the solemn, surging moan of it in the wood was very dreary to hear through the night silence. Feeling strangely wakeful, I resolved to keep the candle alight until I began to grow sleepy. The truth is, I was not quite myself. I was depressed in mind by my disappointment of the morning; and I was worn

out in body by my long walk. Between the two, I own I couldn't face the prospect of lying awake in the darkness, listening to the dismal moan of the wind in the wood.

Sleep stole on me before I was aware of it; my eyes closed, and I fell off to rest, without having so much as thought of extinguishing the candle.

The next thing that I remember was a faint shivering that ran through me from head to foot, and a dreadful sinking pain at my heart, such as I had never felt before. The shivering only disturbed my slumbers—the pain woke me instantly. In one moment I passed from a state of sleep to a state of wakefulness—my eyes wide open—my mind clear on a sudden as if by a miracle.

The candle had burnt down nearly to the last morsel of tallow, but the unsnuffed wick had just fallen off, and the light was, for the moment, fair and full.

Between the foot of the bed and the closed door, I saw a person in my room. The person was a woman, standing looking at me, with a knife in her hand.

It does no credit to my courage to confess it—but the truth *is* the truth. I was struck speechless with terror. There I lay with my eyes on the woman; there the woman stood (with the knife in her hand) with *her* eyes on *me*.

She said not a word as we stared each other in the face; but she moved after a little—moved slowly towards the left-hand side of the bed.

The light fell full on her face. A fair, fine woman, with yellowish flaxen hair, and light grey eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. I noticed these things and fixed them in my mind, before she was quite round at the side of the bed. Without saying a word; without any change in the stony stillness of her face; without any noise following her footfall, she came closer and closer; stopped at the bed-head; and lifted the knife to stab me. I laid my arm over my throat to save it; but, as I saw the blow coming, I threw my hand across the bed to the right side, and jerked my body over that way, just as the knife came down, like lightning, within a hair's-breadth of my shoulder.

My eyes fixed on her arm and her hand—she gave me time to look at them as she slowly drew the knife out of the bed. A white, well-shaped arm, with a pretty down lying lightly over the fair skin. A delicate lady's hand, with a pink flush round the finger-nails.

She drew the knife out, and passed back again slowly to the foot of the bed; she stopped there for a moment looking at me; then she came on without saying a word; without any change in the stony stillness of her face; without any noise following her footfall—came on to the side of the bed where I now lay.

Getting near me, she lifted the knife again, and I drew myself away to the left side. She struck, as before, right into the mattress, with a swift down-

ward action of her arm ; and she missed me, as before, by a hair's breadth. This time my eyes wandered from *her* to the knife. It was like the large clasp-knives which labouring men use to cut their bread and bacon with. Her delicate little fingers did not hide more than two-thirds of the handle ; I noticed that it was made of buck-horn, clean and shining as the blade was, and looking like new.

For the second time she drew the knife out of the bed, and suddenly hid it away in the wide sleeve of her gown. That done, she stopped by the bedside, watching me. For an instant I saw her standing in that position—then the wick of the spent candle fell over into the socket. The flame dwindled to a little blue point, and the room grew dark.

A moment, or less if possible, passed so—and then the wick flamed up, smokily, for the last time. My eyes were still looking for her over the right-hand side of the bed when that last flash of light came. Look as I might, I could see nothing. The woman with the knife was gone.

I began to get back to myself again. I could feel my heart beating ; I could hear the woful moaning of the wind in the wood ; I could leap up in bed, and give the alarm before she escaped from the house. ' Murder ! Wake up there ! Murder !'

Nobody answered to the alarm. I rose and groped my way through the darkness to the door of the room. By that way she must have got in. By that way she must have gone out.

The door of the room was fast locked, exactly as I had left it on going to bed !

I looked at the window. Fast locked too !

Hearing a voice outside, I opened the door. There was the landlord, coming towards me along the passage, with his burning candle in one hand, and his gun in the other.

"What is it ?" he says, looking at me in no very friendly way.

I could only answer him in a whisper. "A woman, with a knife in her hand. In my room. A fair, yellow-haired woman. She jobbed at me with the knife, twice over."

He lifted his candle, and looked at me steadily from head to foot.

"She seems to have missed you—twice over."

"I dodged the knife as it came down. It struck the bed each time. Go in, and see."

The landlord took his candle into the bedroom immediately. In less than a minute he came out again into the passage in a violent passion.

"The devil fly away with you and your woman with the knife ! There isn't a mark in the bed-clothes anywhere. What do you mean by coming into a man's place and frightening his family out of their wits by a dream ?"

A dream ? The woman who had tried to stab me, not a living human being like myself ? I began to shake and shiver. The horrors got hold of me at the bare thought of it.

"I'll leave the house," I said. "Better out on the road in the rain and dark, than back again in that room, after what I've seen in it. Lend me the light to get my clothes by, and tell me what I'm to pay."

The landlord led the way back with his light into the bedroom. "Pay?" says he. "You'll find your score on the slate when you go downstairs. I wouldn't have taken you in for all the money you've got about you, if I had known your dreaming screeching ways beforehand. Look at the bed—where's the cut of a knife in it? Look at the window—is the lock bursted? Look at the door (which I heard you fasten yourself)—is it broke in? A murdering woman with a knife in my house! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

My eyes followed his hand as it pointed first to the bed—then to the window—then to the door. There was no gainsaying it. The bed sheet was as sound as on the day it was made, The window was fast. The door hung on its hinges as steady as ever. I huddled my clothes on without speaking. We went downstairs together. I looked at the clock in the bar room. The time was twenty minutes past two in the morning. I paid my bill; and the landlord let me out. The rain had ceased; but the night was dark, and the wind was bleaker than ever. Little did the darkness, or the cold, or the doubt about the way home matter to *me*. My mind was away from all these things. My mind

was fixed on the vision in the bedroom. What had I seen trying to murder me? The creature of a dream? Or that other creature from the world beyond the grave, whom men call ghost? I could make nothing of it as I walked along in the night; I had made nothing of it by midday—when I stood at last, after many times missing my road, on the doorstep of home.

VI.

My mother came out alone to welcome me back. There were no secrets between us two. I told her all that had happened, just as I have told it to you.

She kept silence till I had done. And then she put a question to me.

“What time was it, Francis, when you saw the Woman in your Dream?”

I had looked at the clock when I left the inn, and had noticed that the hands pointed to twenty minutes past two. Allowing for the time consumed in speaking to the landlord, and in getting on my clothes, I answered that I must have first seen the Woman at two o'clock in the morning. In other words, I had not only seen her on my birthday, but at the hour of my birth.

My mother still kept silence. Lost in her own thoughts, she took me by the hand, and led me into the parlour. Her writing-desk was on the table by the fire-place. She opened it, and signed to me to take a chair by her side.

"My son! your memory is a bad one, and mine is fast failing me. Tell me again what the woman looked like. I want her to be as well known to both of us, years hence, as she is now."

I obeyed; wondering what strange fancy might be working in her mind. I spoke; and she wrote the words as they fell from my lips:—

"Light grey eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. Flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it. White arms, with a down upon them. Little, lady's hands, with a rosy-red look about the fingernails."

"Did you notice how she was dressed, Francis?"

"No, mother."

"Did you notice the knife?"

"Yes. A large clasp-knife, with a buck-horn handle as good as new."

My mother added the description of the knife. Also the year, month, day of the week, and hour of the day when the Dream-Woman appeared to me at the inn. That done, she locked up the paper in her desk.

"Not a word, Francis, to your aunt. Not a word to any living soul. Keep your Dream a secret between you and me."

The weeks passed, and the months passed. My mother never returned to the subject again. As for me, time, which wears out all things, wore out my remembrance of the Dream. Little by little, the image of the Woman grew dimmer and dimmer. Little by little, she faded out of my mind.

VII.

THE story of the warning is now told. Judge for yourself if it was a true warning or a false, when you hear what happened to me on my next birthday.

In the summer time of the year, the Wheel of Fortune turned the right way for me at last. I was smoking my pipe one day, near an old stone-quarry at the entrance to our village, when a carriage accident happened, which gave a new turn, as it were, to my lot in life. It was an accident of the commonest kind—not worth mentioning at any length. A lady driving herself; a runaway horse; a cowardly man-servant in attendance, frightened out of his wits; and the stone-quarry too near to be agreeable—that is what I saw, all in a few moments, between two whiffs of my pipe. I stopped the horse at the edge of the quarry, and got myself a little hurt by the shaft of the chaise. But that didn't matter. The lady declared I had saved her life; and her husband, coming with her to our cottage the next day, took me into his service then and there. The lady happened to be of a dark complexion; and it may amuse you to hear that my aunt Chance instantly pitched on that circumstance as a means of saving the credit of the cards. Here was the promise of the Queen of Spades performed to the very letter, by means of "a dark woman," just as my aunt had told me!

"In the time to come, Francie, beware o' pettin yer ain blinded intairpretation on the cairds. Ye're ower ready, I trow, to murmur under dispensations of Providence that ye canna fathom—like the Eesraelites of auld. I'll say nae mair to ye. Mebbe when the mony's powering into yer poakets, ye'll no forget yer aunt Chance, left like a sparrow on the housetop, wi' a sma' annuitee o' thratty punds a year."

I remained in my situation (at the West-end of London) until the spring of the New Year.

About that time, my master's health failed. The doctors ordered him away to foreign parts, and the establishment was broken up. But the turn in my luck still held good. When I left my place, I left it—thanks to the generosity of my kind master—with a yearly allowance granted to me, in remembrance of the day when I had saved my mistress's life. For the future, I could go back to service or not, as I pleased; my little income was enough to support my mother and myself.

My master and mistress left England towards the end of February. Certain matters of business to do for them, detained me in London until the last day of the month. I was only able to leave for our village by the evening train, to keep my birthday with my mother as usual. It was bedtime when I got to the cottage; and I was sorry to find that she was far from well. To make matters worse, she had finished her bottle of medicine on

the previous day, and had omitted to get it replenished, as the doctor had strictly directed. He dispensed his own medicines, and I offered to go and knock him up. She refused to let me do this; and, after giving me my supper, sent me away to my bed.

I fell asleep for a little, and woke again. My mother's bedchamber was next to mine. I heard my aunt Chance's heavy footsteps going to and fro in the room, and, suspecting something wrong, knocked at the door. My mother's pains had returned upon her; there was a serious necessity for relieving her sufferings as speedily as possible. I put on my clothes, and ran off, with the medicine-bottle in my hand, to the other end of the village, where the doctor lived. The church clock chimed the quarter to two on my birthday just as I reached his house. One ring at the night-bell brought him to his bedroom window to speak to me. He told me to wait, and he would let me in at the surgery door. I noticed, while I was waiting, that the night was wonderfully fair and warm for the time of year. The old stone-quarry where the carriage accident had happened was within view. The moon in the clear heavens lit it up almost as bright as day.

In a minute or two, the doctor let me into the surgery. I closed the door, noticing that he had left his room very lightly clad. He kindly pardoned my mother's neglect of his directions

and set to work at once at compounding the medicine. We were both intent on the bottle; he filling it, and I holding the light—when we heard the surgery door suddenly opened from the street.

VIII.

WHO could possibly be up and about in our quiet village at the second hour of the morning?

The person who had opened the door appeared within range of the light of the candle. To complete our amazement, the person proved to be a woman!

She walked up to the counter, and standing side-by-side with me, lifted her veil. At the moment when she showed her face, I heard the church clock strike two. She was a stranger to me, and a stranger to the doctor. She was also, beyond all comparison, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life.

“I saw the light under the door,” she said. “I want some medicine.”

She spoke quite composedly, as if there was nothing at all extraordinary in her being out in the village at two in the morning, and following me into the surgery to ask for medicine! The doctor stared at her as if he suspected his own eyes of deceiving him. “Who are you?” he asked. “How do you come to be wandering about at this time in the morning?”

She paid no heed to his questions. She only told him coolly what she wanted.

"I have got a bad toothache. I want a bottle of laudanum."

The doctor recovered himself when she asked for the laudanum. He was on his own ground, you know, when it came to a matter of laudanum; and he spoke to her smartly enough this time.

"Oh, you have got the toothache, have you? Let me look at the tooth."

She shook her head, and laid a two shilling piece on the counter.

"I won't trouble you to look at the tooth," she said. "There is the money. Let me have the laudanum, if you please."

The doctor put the two-shilling piece back again in her hand.

"I don't sell laudanum to strangers," he answered. "If you are in any distress of body or mind, that is another matter. I shall be glad to help you."

She put the money back in her pocket. "You can't help me," she said, as quietly as ever. "Good morning."

With that, she opened the surgery door to go out again into the street.

So far, I had not spoken a word on my side. I had stood with the candle in my hand (not knowing I was holding it)—with my eyes fixed on her, with my mind fixed on her—like a man bewitched.

Her looks betrayed, even more plainly than her words, her resolution, in one way or another, to destroy herself. When she opened the door, in my alarm at what might happen I found the use of my tongue.

"Stop?" I cried out. "Wait for me. I want to speak to you before you go away."

She lifted her eyes with a look of careless surprise, and a mocking smile on her lips.

"What can *you* have to say to me?" She stopped, and laughed to herself. "Why not?" she said. "I have got nothing to do, and nowhere to go." She turned back a step, and nodded to me. "You're a strange man—I think I'll humour you—I'll wait outside." The door of the surgery closed on her. She was gone.

I am ashamed to own what happened next. The only excuse for me is that I was really and truly a man bewitched. I turned me round to follow her out, without once thinking of my mother. The doctor stopped me.

"Don't forget the medicine," he said. "And if you will take my advice, don't trouble yourself about that woman. Rouse up the constable. It's his business to look after her—not yours."

I held out my hand for the medicine in silence: I was afraid I should fail in respect if I trusted myself to answer him. He must have seen, as I saw, that she wanted the laudanum to poison herself. He had, to my mind, taken a very heartless

view of the matter. I just thanked him when he gave me the medicine—and went out.

She was waiting for me as she had promised ; walking slowly to and fro—a tall, graceful, solitary figure in the bright moonbeams. They shed over her fair complexion, her bright golden hair, her large grey eyes, just the light that suited them best. She looked hardly mortal when she first turned to speak to me.

“Well?” she said. “And what do you want?”

In spite of my pride, or my shyness, or my better sense—whichever it might be—all my heart went out to her in a moment. I caught hold of her by the hands, and owned what was in my thoughts, as freely as if I had known her for half a lifetime.

“You mean to destroy yourself,” I said. “And I mean to prevent you from doing it. If I follow you about all night, I’ll prevent you from doing it.”

She laughed. “You saw yourself that he wouldn’t sell me the laudanum. Do you really care whether I live or die?” She squeezed my hands gently as she put the question: her eyes searched mine with a languid, lingering look in them that ran through me like fire. My voice died away on my lips; I couldn’t answer her.

She understood, without my answering. “You have given me a fancy for living, by speaking kindly to me,” she said. “Kindness has a wonderful effect on women, and dogs, and other domestic animals. It is only men who are superior to



*"She was waiting for me, as she had promised; walking slowly to and fro—
a tall, graceful, solitary figure in the bright moonbeams."—p. 178*



kindness. Make your mind easy—I promise to take as much care of myself as if I was the happiest woman living! Don't let me keep you here, out of your bed. Which way are you going?"

Miserable wretch that I was, I had forgotten my mother—with the medicine in my hand!

"I am going home," I said. "Where are you staying? At the inn?"

She laughed her bitter laugh, and pointed to the stone-quarry. "There is *my* inn for to-night," she said. "When I got tired of walking about, I rested there."

We walked on together, on my way home. I took the liberty of asking her if she had any friends.

"I thought I had one friend left," she said, "or you would never have met me in this place. It turns out I was wrong. My friend's door was closed in my face some hours since: my friend's servants threatened me with the police. I had nowhere else to go, after trying my luck in your neighbourhood; and nothing left but my two-shilling piece and these rags on my back. What respectable innkeeper would take *me* into his house? I walked about, wondering how I could find my way out of the world without disfiguring myself, and without suffering much pain. You have no river in these parts. I didn't see my way out of the world, till I heard you ringing at the doctor's house.

I got a glimpse at the bottles in the surgery, when he let you in, and I thought of the laudanum directly. What were you doing there? Who is that medicine for? Your wife?"

"I am not married."

She laughed again. "Not married! If I was a little better dressed there might be a chance for ME. Where do you live? Here?"

We had arrived, by this time, at my mother's door. She held out her hand to say good-bye. Houseless and homeless as she was, she never asked me to give her a shelter for the night. It was *my* proposal that she should rest under my roof, unknown to my mother and my aunt. Our kitchen was built out at the back of the cottage: she might remain there unseen and unheard until the household was astir in the morning. I led her into the kitchen, and set a chair for her by the dying embers of the fire. I dare say I was to blame—shamefully to blame, if you like. I only wonder what *you* would have done in my place. On your word of honour as a man, would *you* have let that beautiful creature wander back to the shelter of the stone-quarry like a stray dog? God help the woman who is foolish enough to trust and love you, if you would have done that!

I left her by the fire, and went to my mother's room.

IX.

IF you have ever felt the heart-ache, you will know what I suffered in secret when my mother took my hand, and said, "I am sorry, Francis, that your night's rest has been disturbed through *me*." I gave her the medicine ; and I waited by her till the pains abated. My aunt Chance went back to her bed ; and my mother and I were left alone. I noticed that her writing-desk, moved from its customary place, was on the bed by her side. She saw me looking at it. "This is your birthday, Francis," she said. "Have you anything to tell me ?" I had so completely forgotten my Dream, that I had no notion of what was passing in her mind when she said those words. For a moment there was a guilty fear in me that she suspected something. I turned away my face, and said, "No, mother ; I have nothing to tell." She signed to me to stoop down over the pillow and kiss her. "God bless you, my love !" she said ; "and many happy returns of the day." She patted my hand, and closed her weary eyes, and, little by little, fell off peaceably into sleep.

I stole downstairs again. I think the good influence of my mother must have followed me down. At any rate, this is true : I stopped with my hand on the closed kitchen door, and said to myself "Suppose I leave the house, and leave the village, without seeing her or speaking to her more ?"

Should I really have fled from temptation in this way, if I had been left to myself to decide? Who can tell? As things were, I was not left to decide. While my doubt was in my mind, she heard me, and opened the kitchen door. My eyes and her eyes met. That ended it.

We were together, unsuspected and undisturbed, for the next two hours. Time enough for her to reveal the secret of her wasted life. Time enough for her to take possession of me as her own, to do with me as she liked. It is needless to dwell here on the misfortunes which had brought her low: they are misfortunes too common to interest anybody.

Her name was Alicia Warlock. She had been born and bred a lady. She had lost her station, her character, and her friends. Virtue shuddered at the sight of her; and Vice had got her for the rest of her days. Shocking and common, as I told you. It made no difference to *me*. I have said it already—I say it again—I was a man bewitched. Is there anything so very wonderful in that? Just remember who I was. Among the honest women in my own station in life, where could I have found the like of *her*? Could *they* walk as she walked? and look as she looked? When *they* gave me a kiss, did their lips linger over it as hers did? Had *they* her skin, her laugh, her foot, her hand, her touch? *She* never had a speck of dirt on her: I tell you her flesh was a perfume. When she em-

braced me, her arms folded round me like the wings of angels; and her smile covered me softly with its light like the sun in heaven. I leave you to laugh at me, or to cry over me, just as your temper may incline. I am not trying to excuse myself—I am trying to explain. You are gentlefolks; what dazzled and maddened *me*, is everyday experience to *you*. Fallen or not, angel or devil, it came to this—she was a lady; and I was a groom.

Before the house was astir, I got her away (by the workmen's train) to a large manufacturing town in our parts.

Here—with my savings in money to help her—she could get her outfit of decent clothes, and her lodging among strangers who asked no questions so long as they were paid. Here—now on one pretence and now on another—I could visit her, and we could both plan together what our future lives were to be. I need not tell you that I stood pledged to make her my wife. A man in my station always marries a woman of her sort.

Do you wonder if I was happy at this time? I should have been perfectly happy, but for one little drawback. It was this:—I was never quite at my ease in the presence of my promised wife.

I don't mean that I was shy with her, or suspicious of her, or ashamed of her. The uneasiness I am speaking of was caused by a faint doubt in my mind, whether I had not seen her somewhere, before the morning when we met at the doctor's

house. Over and over again, I found myself wondering whether her face did not remind me of some other face—*what* other I never could tell. This strange feeling, this one question that could never be answered, vexed me to a degree that you would hardly credit. It came between us at the strangest times—oftenest, however, at night, when the candles were lit. You have known what it is to try and remember a forgotten name—and to fail, search as you may, to find it in your mind. That was my case. I failed to find my lost face, just as you failed to find your lost name.

In three weeks, we had talked matters over, and had arranged how I was to make a clean breast of it at home. By Alicia's advice, I was to describe her as having been one of my fellow-servants, during the time when I was employed under my kind master and mistress in London. There was no fear now of my mother taking any harm from the shock of a great surprise. Her health had improved during the three weeks' interval. On the first evening when she was able to take her old place at tea-time, I summoned my courage, and told her I was going to be married. The poor soul flung her arms round my neck, and burst out crying for joy. "Oh, Francis!" she says, "I am so glad you will have somebody to comfort you and care for you when I am gone!" As for my aunt Chance, you can anticipate what *she* did, without being told. Ah, me! If there had really

been any prophetic virtue in the cards, what a terrible warning they might have given us that night!

It was arranged that I was to bring my promised wife to dinner at the cottage on the next day.

X.

I OWN I was proud of Alicia when I led her into our little parlour at the appointed time. She had never, to my mind, looked so beautiful as she looked that day. I never noticed any other woman's dress: I noticed hers as carefully as if I had been a woman myself! She wore a black silk gown, with plain collar and cuffs, and a modest lavender-coloured bonnet, with one white rose in it placed at the side. My mother, dressed in her Sunday best, rose up, all in a flutter, to welcome her daughter-in-law that was to be. She walked forward a few steps, half smiling, half in tears—she looked Alicia full in the face—and suddenly stood still. Her cheeks turned white in an instant; her eyes stared in horror; her hands dropped helplessly at her sides. She staggered back, and fell into the arms of my aunt, standing behind her. It was no swoon: she kept her senses. Her eyes turned slowly from Alicia to me. "Francis," she said, "does that woman's face remind you of nothing?"

Before I could answer, she pointed to her writing-

desk on the table at the fireside. "Bring it!" she cried, "bring it!"

At the same moment, I felt Alicia's hand laid on my shoulder, and saw Alicia's face red with anger—and no wonder!

"What does this mean?" she asked. "Does your mother want to insult me?"

I said a few words to quiet her, what they were I don't remember—I was so confused and astonished at the time. Before I had done, I heard my mother behind me.

My aunt had fetched her desk. She had opened it; she had taken a paper from it. Step by step, helping herself along by the wall, she came nearer and nearer, with the paper in her hand. She looked at the paper—she looked in Alicia's face—she lifted the long, loose sleeve of her gown, and examined her hand and arm. I saw fear suddenly take the place of anger in Alicia's eyes. She shook herself free of my mother's grasp. "Mad!" she said to herself, "and Francis never told me!" With those words she ran out of the room.

I was hastening out after her, when my mother signed to me to stop. She read the words written on the paper. While they fell slowly, one by one, from her lips, she pointed towards the open door.

"Light grey eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. Flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it. White arms, with a down upon them. Little, lady's hand, with a rosy-red look about the finger-

nails. The Dream-Woman, Francis! The Dream-Woman!"

Something darkened the parlour-window as those words were spoken. I looked sidelong at the shadow. Alicia Warlock had come back! She was peering in at us over the low window-blind. There was the fatal face which had first looked at me in the bedroom of the lonely inn! There, resting on the window-blind, was the lovely little hand which had held the murderous knife. I *had* seen her before we met in the village. The Dream-Woman! The Dream-Woman!

XI.

I EXPECT nobody to approve of what I have next to tell of myself.

In three weeks from the day when my mother had identified her with the Woman of the Dream, I took Alicia Warlock to church, and made her my wife. I was a man bewitched. Again and again I say it, I was a man bewitched!

During the interval before my marriage, our little household at the cottage was broken up. My mother and my aunt quarrelled. My mother, believing in the Dream, entreated me to break off my engagement. My aunt, believing in the cards, urged me to marry.

This difference of opinion produced a dispute between them, in the course of which my aunt

Chance—quite unconscious of having any superstitious feelings of her own—actually set out the cards which prophesied happiness to me in my married life, and asked my mother how anybody but “a blinded heathen could be fule enough, after seeing those cairds, to believe in a dream!” This was, naturally, too much for my mother’s patience; hard words followed on either side; Mrs. Chance returned in dudgeon to her friends in Scotland. She left me a written statement of my future prospects, as revealed by the cards, and with it an address at which a Post-office order would reach her. “The day was no that far off,” she remarked, “when Francie might remember what he owed to his aunt Chance, maintaining her ain unbleemished widowhood on thratty pundis a year.”

Having refused to give her sanction to my marriage, my mother also refused to be present at the wedding, or to visit Alicia afterwards. There was no anger at the bottom of this conduct on her part. Believing as she did in the Dream, she was simply in mortal fear of my wife. I understood this, and I made allowances for her. Not a cross word passed between us. My one happy remembrance now—though I did disobey her in the matter of my marriage—is this: I loved and respected my good mother to the last.

As for my wife, she expressed no regret at the estrangement between her mother-in-law and herself. By common consent, we never spoke on that

subject. We settled in the manufacturing town which I have already mentioned; and we kept a lodging-house. My kind master, at my request, granted me a lump sum in place of my annuity. This put us into a good house, decently furnished. For a while, things went well enough. I may describe myself at this time of my life as a happy man.

My misfortunes began with a return of the complaint from which my mother had already suffered. The doctor confessed, when I asked him the question, that there was danger to be dreaded this time. Naturally, after hearing this, I was a good deal away at the cottage. Naturally also, I left the business of looking after the house, in my absence, to my wife. Little by little, I found her beginning to alter towards me. While my back was turned, she formed acquaintances with people of the doubtful and dissipated sort. One day, I observed something in her manner which forced the suspicion on me that she had been drinking. Before the week was out, my suspicion was a certainty. From keeping company with drunkards, she had grown to be a drunkard herself.

I did all a man could do to reclaim her. Quite useless! She had never really returned the love I felt for her: I had no influence; I could do nothing. My mother, hearing of this last worst trouble, resolved to try what her influence could do. Ill as she was, I found her one day dressed to go out.

"I am not long for this world, Francis," she said. "I shall not feel easy on my death-bed, unless I have done my best to the last to make you happy. I mean to put my own fears and my own feelings out of the question, and to go with you to your wife, and try what I can do to reclaim her. Take me home with you, Francis. Let me do all I can to help my son, before it's too late."

How could I disobey her? We took the railway to the town: it was only half an hour's ride. By one o'clock in the afternoon we reached my house. It was our dinner hour, and Alicia was in the kitchen. I was able to take my mother quietly into the parlour, and then prepare my wife for the visit. She had drunk but little at that early hour, and, luckily, the devil in her was tamed for the time.

She followed me into the parlour, and the meeting passed off better than I had ventured to forecast; with this one drawback, that my mother—though she tried hard to control herself—shrank from looking my wife in the face when she spoke to her. It was a relief to me when Alicia began to prepare the table for dinner.

She laid the cloth, brought in the bread-tray, and cut some slices for us from the loaf. Then she returned to the kitchen. At that moment, while I was still anxiously watching my mother, I was startled by seeing the same ghastly change pass over her face which had altered it on the morning

when Alicia and she first met. Before I could say a word, she started up with a look of horror.

“Take me back!—home, home again, Francis! Come with me, and never go back more!”

I was afraid to ask for an explanation; I could only sign to her to be silent, and help her quickly to the door. As we passed the bread-tray on the table, she stopped and pointed to it.

“Did you see what your wife cut your bread with?” she asked.

“No, mother; I was not noticing. What was it?”

“Look!”

I did look. A new clasp knife, with a buck-horn handle, lay with the loaf in the bread-tray. I stretched out my hand to possess myself of it. At the same moment, there was a noise in the kitchen, and my mother caught me by the arm.

“The knife of the Dream! Francis, I’m faint with fear—take me away before she comes back!”

I couldn’t speak, to comfort or even to answer her. Superior as I was to superstition, the discovery of the knife staggered me. In silence, I helped my mother out of the house, and took her home.

I held out my hand to say good-bye. She tried to stop me.

“Don’t go back, Francis! don’t go back!”

“I must get the knife, mother. I must go back by the next train.”

I held to that resolution. By the next train I went back.

XII.

My wife had, of course, discovered our secret departure from the house. She had been drinking. She was in a fury of passion. The dinner in the kitchen was flung under the grate; the cloth was off the parlour table. Where was the knife?

I was foolish enough to ask for it. She refused to give it to me. In the course of the dispute between us which followed, I discovered that there was a horrible story attached to the knife. It had been used in a murder—years since—and had been so skilfully hidden that the authorities had been unable to produce it at the trial. By help of some of her disreputable friends, my wife had been able to purchase this relic of a bygone crime. Her perverted nature set some horrid unacknowledged value on the knife. Seeing there was no hope of getting it by fair means, I determined to search for it, later in the day, in secret. The search was unsuccessful. Night came on, and I left the house to walk about the streets. You will understand what a broken man I was by this time, when I tell you I was afraid to sleep in the same room with her!

Three weeks passed. Still she refused to give up the knife; and still that fear of sleeping in the same room with her possessed me. I walked about at night, or dozed in the parlour, or sat watching

by my mother's bedside. Before the end of the first week in the new month, the worst misfortune of all befell me—my mother died. It wanted then but a short time to my birthday. She had longed to live till that day. I was present at her death. Her last words in this world were addressed to me.

“Don't go back, my son—don't go back !”

I was obliged to go back, if it was only to watch my wife. In the last days of my mother's illness she had spitefully added a sting to my grief by declaring that she would assert her right to attend the funeral. In spite of all that I could do or say, she held to her word. On the day appointed for the burial she forced herself—inflamed and shameless with drink into my presence, and swore she would walk in the funeral procession to my mother's grave.

This last insult—after all I had gone through already—was more than I could endure. It maddened me. Try to make allowances for a man beside himself. I struck her.

The instant the blow was dealt, I repented it. She crouched down, silent, in a corner of the room, and eyed me steadily. It was a look that cooled my hot blood in an instant. There was no time now to think of making atonement. I could only risk the worst, and make sure of her till the funeral was over. I locked her into her bedroom.

When I came back, after laying my mother in

the grave, I found her sitting by the bedside, very much altered in look and bearing, with a bundle on her lap. She faced me quietly; she spoke with a curious stillness in her voice—strangely and unnaturally composed in look and manner.

“No man has ever struck me yet,” she said. “My husband shall have no second opportunity. Set the door open, and let me go.”

She passed me, and left the room. I saw her walk away up the street.

Was she gone for good?

All that night I watched and waited. No footstep came near the house. The next night, overcome by fatigue, I lay down on the bed in my clothes, with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning. My slumber was not disturbed. The third night, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, passed, and nothing happened. I lay down on the seventh night, still suspicious of something happening; still in my clothes; still with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning.

My rest was disturbed. I woke twice, without any sensation of uneasiness. The third time, that horrid shivering of the night at the lonely inn, that awful sinking pain at the heart, came back again, and roused me in an instant.

My eyes turned towards the left-hand side of the bed. And there stood, looking at me——

The Dream-Woman again? No! My wife. The living woman, with the face of the Dream—in the

attitude of the Dream—the fair arm up; the knife clasped in the delicate white hand.

I sprang upon her on the instant; but not quickly enough to stop her from hiding the knife. Without a word from me, without a cry from her, I pinioned her in a chair. With one hand I felt up her sleeve; and there, where the Dream-Woman had hidden the knife, my wife had hidden it—the knife with the buck-horn handle, that looked like new.

What I felt when I made that discovery I could not realise at the time, and I can't describe now. I took one steady look at her with the knife in my hand.

“You meant to kill me?” I said.

“Yes,” she answered; “I meant to kill you.” She crossed her arms over her bosom, and stared me coolly in the face. “I shall do it yet,” she said. “With that knife.”

I don't know what possessed me—I swear to you I am no coward: and yet I acted like a coward. The horrors got hold of me. I couldn't look at her—I couldn't speak to her. I left her (with the knife in my hand), and went out into the night.

There was a bleak wind abroad, and the smell of rain was in the air. The church clocks chimed the quarter as I walked beyond the last house in the town. I asked the first policeman I met what

hour that was, of which the quarter past had just struck.

The man looked at his watch, and answered, "Two o'clock." Two in the morning. What day of the month was this day that had just begun? I reckoned it up from the date of my mother's funeral. The horrid parallel between the dream and the reality was complete—it was my birthday!

Had I escaped the mortal peril which the dream foretold? or had I only received a second warning?

As that doubt crossed my mind I stopped on my way out of the town. The air had revived me—I felt in some degree like my own self again. After a little thinking, I began to see plainly the mistake I had made in leaving my wife free to go where she liked and to do as she pleased.

I turned instantly, and made my way back to the house.

It was still dark. I had left the candle burning in the bedchamber. When I looked up to the window of the room now, there was no light in it. I advanced to the house door. On going away, I remembered to have closed it; on trying it now, I found it open.

I waited outside, never losing sight of the house till daylight. Then I ventured in-doors—listened, and heard nothing—looked into the kitchen, scullery, parlour, and found nothing—went up at last into the bedroom. It was empty.

A pick-lock lay on the floor, which told me how

she had gained entrance in the night. And that was the one trace I could find of the Dream-Woman.

XIII.

I WAITED in the house till the town was astir for the day, and then I went to consult a lawyer. In the confused state of my mind at the time, I had one clear notion of what I meant to do: I was determined to sell my house and leave the neighbourhood. There were obstacles in the way which I had not counted on. I was told I had creditors to satisfy before I could leave—I, who had given my wife the money to pay my bills regularly every week! Enquiry showed that she had embezzled every farthing of the money that I had entrusted to her. I had no choice but to pay over again.

Placed in this awkward position, my first duty was to set things right, with the help of my lawyer. During my forced sojourn in the town I did two foolish things. And, as a consequence that followed, I heard once more, and heard for the last time, of my wife.

In the first place, having got possession of the knife, I was rash enough to keep it in my pocket. In the second place, having something of importance to say to the lawyer, at a late hour of the evening, I went to his house after dark—alone and on foot. I got there safely enough. Returning, I was seized on from behind by two men: dragged

down a passage, and robbed—not only of the little money I had about me, but also of the knife. It was the lawyer's opinion (as it was mine) that the thieves were among the disreputable acquaintances formed by my wife, and that they had attacked me at her instigation. To confirm this view I received a letter the next day, without date or address, written in Alicia's hand. The first line informed me that the knife was back again in her possession. The second line reminded me of the day when I had struck her. The third line warned me that she would wash out the stain of that blow in my blood, and repeated the words, "I shall do it with the knife!"

These things happened a year ago. The law laid hands on the men who had robbed me; but from that time to this, the law has failed completely to find a trace of my wife.

My story is told. When I had paid the creditors and paid the legal expenses, I had barely five pounds left out of the sale of my house; and I had the world to begin over again. Some months since—drifting here and there—I found my way to Underbridge. The landlord at the inn had known something of my father's family in times past. He gave me (all he had to give) my food, and shelter in the yard. Except on market-days, there is nothing to do. In the coming winter the inn is to be shut up, and I shall have to shift for myself. My old master would help me if I applied to him

—but I don't like to apply : he has done more for me already than I deserve. Besides, in another year who knows but my troubles may all be at an end ? Next winter will bring me nigh to my next birthday, and my next birthday may be the day of my death. Yes ! it's true I sat up all last night ; and I heard two in the morning strike : and nothing happened. Still, allowing for that, the time to come is a time I don't trust. My wife has got the knife—my wife is looking for me. I am above superstition, mind ! I don't say I believe in dreams ; I only say, Alicia Warlock is looking for me. It is possible I may be wrong. It is possible I may be right. Who can tell ?

THE THIRD NARRATIVE.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY PERCY FAIRBANK.

XIV.

WE took leave of Francis Raven at the door of Farleigh Hall, with the understanding that he might expect to hear from us again.

The same night Mrs. Fairbank and I had a discussion in the sanctuary of our own room. The topic was "The Ostler's Story;" and the question in dispute between us turned on the measure of charitable duty that we owed to the ostler himself.

The view I took of the man's narrative was of the purely matter-of-fact kind. Francis Raven had, in my opinion, brooded over the misty connection between his strange dream and his vile wife, until his mind was in a state of partial delusion on that subject. I was quite willing to help him with a trifle of money, and to recommend him to the kindness of my lawyer, if he was really in any danger and wanted advice. There my idea of my duty towards this afflicted person began and ended.

Confronted with this sensible view of the matter, Mrs. Fairbank's romantic temperament rushed, as usual, into extremes. "I should no more think of losing sight of Francis Raven when his next birthday comes round," says my wife, "than I should think of laying down a good story with the last chapters unread. I am positively determined, Percy, to take him back with us, when we return to France, in the capacity of groom. What does one man more or less among the horses matter to people as rich as we are?" In this strain the partner of my joys and sorrows ran on, perfectly impenetrable to everything that I could say on the side of common sense. Need I tell my married brethren how it ended? Of course I allowed my wife to irritate me, and spoke to her sharply. Of course my wife turned her face away indignantly on the conjugal pillow, and burst into tears. Of course, upon that, "Mr." made his excuses, and "Mrs." had her own way.

Before the week was out we rode over to Underbridge, and duly offered to Francis Raven a place in our service as supernumerary groom.

At first the poor fellow seemed hardly able to realise his own extraordinary good fortune. Recovering himself, he expressed his gratitude modestly and becomingly. Mrs. Fairbank's ready sympathies overflowed, as usual, at her lips. She talked to him about our home in France, as if the worn, grey-headed ostler had been a child. "Such

a dear old house, Francis; and such pretty gardens! Stables ten times as big as your stables here: quite a choice of rooms for you. You must learn the name of our house—it is called *Maison Rouge*. Our nearest town is Metz. We are within a walk of the beautiful river Moselle. And when we want a change we have only to take the railway to the frontier, and find ourselves in Germany.”

Listening, so far, with a very bewildered face, Francis started and changed colour when my wife reached the end of her last sentence.

“Germany?” he repeated.

“Yes. Does Germany remind you of anything?”

The ostler’s eyes looked down sadly on the ground. “Germany reminds me of my wife,” he replied.

“Indeed? How?”

“She once told me she had lived in Germany—long before I knew her—in the time when she was a young girl.”

“Was she living with relations or friends?”

“She was living as governess in a foreign family.”

“In what part of Germany?”

“I don’t remember, ma’am. I doubt if she told me.”

“Did she tell you the name of the family?”

“Yes, ma’am. It was a foreign name, and it has slipped my memory long since. The head of the family was a wine-grower in a large way of business—I remember that.”

“Did you hear what sort of wine he grew? There are wine-growers in our neighbourhood. Was it Moselle wine?”

“I couldn't say, ma'am. I doubt if I ever heard.”

There the conversation dropped. We engaged to communicate with Francis Raven before we left England, and took our leave.

I had made my arrangements to pay our round of visits to English friends, and to return to *Maison Rouge* in the summer. On the eve of departure, certain difficulties in connection with the management of some landed property of mine in Ireland, obliged us to alter our plans. Instead of getting back to our house in France in the summer, we only returned a week or two before Christmas. Francis Raven accompanied us, and was duly established, in the nominal capacity of stable-helper, among the servants at *Maison Rouge*.

Before long, some of the objections to taking him into our employment, which I had foreseen and had vainly mentioned to my wife, forced themselves on our attention in no very agreeable form.

Francis Raven failed (as I had feared he would) to get on smoothly with his fellow-servants. They were all French; and not one of them understood English. Francis, on his side, was equally ignorant of French. His reserved manners, his melancholy temperament, his solitary ways—all told

against him. Our servants called him "the English Bear." He grew widely known in the neighbourhood under his nick-name. Quarrels took place, ending once or twice in blows. It became plain, even to Mrs. Fairbank herself, that some wise change must be made. While we were still considering what the change was to be, the unfortunate ostler was thrown on our hands for some time to come by an accident in the stables. Still pursued by his proverbial ill-luck, the poor wretch's leg was broken by a kick from a horse.

He was attended to by our own surgeon, in his comfortable bedroom at the stables. As the date of his birthday drew near he was still confined to his bed.

Physically speaking, he was doing very well. Morally speaking, the surgeon was not satisfied. Francis Raven was suffering under some mysterious mental disturbance, which interfered seriously with his rest at night. Hearing this, I thought it my duty to tell the medical attendant what was preying on the patient's mind. As a practical man, he shared my opinion that the ostler was in a state of delusion on the subject of his Wife and his Dream. "Curable delusion, in my opinion," the surgeon added, "if the experiment could be fairly tried."

"How can it be tried?" I asked.

Instead of replying, the surgeon put a question to me, on his side.

"Do you happen to know," he said, "that this year is Leap Year?"

"Mrs. Fairbank reminded me of it yesterday," I answered. "Otherwise I might *not* have known it."

"Do you think Francis Raven knows that this year is Leap Year?"

(I began to see dimly what my friend was driving at.)

"It depends," I answered, "on whether he has got an English almanack. Suppose he has *not* got the almanack—what then?"

"In that case," pursued the surgeon, "Francis Raven is innocent of all suspicion that there is a twenty-ninth day in February this year. As a necessary consequence—what will he do? He will anticipate the appearance of the Woman with the Knife, at two in the morning on the twenty-ninth of February, instead of the first of March. Let him suffer all his superstitious terrors on the wrong day. Leave him, on the day that is really his birthday, to pass a perfectly quiet night, and to be as sound asleep as other people at two in the morning. And then, when he wakes comfortably in time for his breakfast, shame him out of his delusion by telling him the truth."

I agreed to try the experiment. Leaving the surgeon to caution Mrs. Fairbank on the subject of Leap Year, I went to the stables to see Francis Raven.

XV.

THE poor fellow was full of forebodings of the fate in store for him on the ominous first of March. He eagerly entreated me to order one of the men-servants to sit up with him on the birthday morning. In granting his request, I asked him to tell me on which day of the week his birthday fell. He reckoned the days on his fingers; and proved his innocence of all suspicion that it was Leap Year by fixing on the twenty-ninth of February, in the full persuasion that it was the first of March. Pledged to try the surgeon's experiment, I left his error uncorrected, of course. In so doing, I took my first step blindfold towards the last act in the drama of the Ostler's Dream.

The next day brought with it a little domestic difficulty, which indirectly and strangely associated itself with the coming end.

My wife received a letter, inviting us to assist in celebrating the "Silver Wedding" of two worthy German neighbours of ours—Mr. and Mrs. Beldheimer. Mr. Beldheimer was a large wine-grower on the banks of the Moselle. His house was situated on the frontier-line of France and Germany; and the distance from our house was sufficiently considerable to make it necessary for us to sleep under our host's roof. Under these circumstances, if we accepted the invitation, a comparison

of dates showed that we should be away from home on the morning of the first of March. Mrs. Fairbank—holding to her absurd resolution to see with her own eyes what might, or might not, happen to Francis Raven on his birthday—flatly declined to leave *Maison Rouge*. “It’s easy to send an excuse,” she said, in her off-hand manner.

I failed, for my part, to see any easy way out of the difficulty. The celebration of a “Silver Wedding” in Germany, is the celebration of twenty-five years of happy married life; and the host’s claim upon the consideration of his friends on such an occasion is something in the nature of a Royal “command.” After considerable discussion, finding my wife’s obstinacy invincible, and feeling that the absence of both of us from the festival would certainly offend our friends, I left Mrs. Fairbank to make her excuses for herself, and directed her to accept the invitation so far as I was concerned. In so doing, I took my second step, blindfold, towards the last act in the drama of the *Ostler’s Dream*.

A week elapsed; the last days of February were at hand. Another domestic difficulty happened; and, again, this event also proved to be strangely associated with the coming end.

My head groom at the stables was one Joseph Rigobert. He was an ill-conditioned fellow, inordinately vain of his personal appearance, and by no means scrupulous in his conduct with women. His one virtue consisted in his fondness for horses,

and in the care he took of the animals under his charge. In a word, he was too good a groom to be easily replaced, or he would have quitted my service long since. On the occasion of which I am now writing, he was reported to me by my steward as growing idle and disorderly in his habits. The principal offence alleged against him was, that he had been seen that day in the city of Metz, in the company of a woman (supposed to be an Englishwoman), whom he was entertaining at a tavern, when he ought to have been on his way back to *Maison Rouge*. The man's defence was that "the lady" (as he called her) was an English stranger, unacquainted with the ways of the place, and that he had only shown her where she could obtain some refreshment at her own request. I administered the necessary reprimand, without troubling myself to enquire further into the matter. In failing to do this, I took my third step, blindfold, towards the last act in the drama of the *Ostler's Dream*.

On the evening of the twenty-eighth, I informed the servants at the stables that one of them must watch through the night by the Englishman's bed-side. Joseph Rigobert immediately volunteered for the duty—as a means, no doubt, of winning his way back to my favour. I accepted his proposal.

That day, the surgeon dined with us. Towards midnight he and I left the smoking-room, and repaired to Francis Raven's bed-side. Rigobert was at his

post, with no very agreeable expression on his face. The Frenchman and the Englishman had evidently not got on well together, so far. Francis Raven lay helpless on his bed, waiting silently for two in the morning, and the Dream-Woman.

"I have come, Francis, to bid you good night," I said, cheerfully. "To-morrow morning I shall look in at breakfast time, before I leave home on a journey."

"Thank you for all your kindness, sir. You will not see me alive to-morrow morning. She will find me this time. Mark my words—she will find me this time."

"My good fellow! she couldn't find you in England. How in the world is she to find you in France?"

"It's borne in on my mind, sir, that she will find me here. At two in the morning on my birthday I shall see her again, and see her for the last time."

"Do you mean that she will kill you?"

"I mean that, sir. She will kill me—with the knife."

"And with Rigobert in the room to protect you?"

"I am a doomed man. Fifty Rigoberts couldn't protect me."

"And yet you wanted somebody to sit up with you?"

"Mere weakness, sir. I don't like to be left alone on my death-bed."

I looked at the surgeon. If he had encouraged me, I should certainly, out of sheer compassion, have confessed to Francis Raven the trick that we were playing him. The surgeon held to his experiment; the surgeon's face plainly said—"No."

The next day (the twenty-ninth of February) was the day of the "Silver Wedding." The first thing in the morning, I went to Francis Raven's room. Rigobert met me at the door.

"How has he passed the night?" I asked.

"Saying his prayers, and looking for ghosts," Rigobert answered. "A lunatic asylum is the only proper place for him."

I approached the bedside. "Well, Francis, here you are, safe and sound, in spite of what you said to me last night."

His eyes rested on mine with a vacant, wondering look.

"I don't understand it," he said.

"Did you see anything of your wife when the clock struck two?"

"No, sir."

"Did anything happen?"

"Nothing happened, sir."

"Doesn't *this* satisfy you that you were wrong?"

His eyes still kept their vacant, wondering look. He only repeated the words he had spoken already:

"I don't understand it."

I made a last attempt to cheer him. "Come,

come, Francis! keep a good heart. You will be out of bed in a fortnight."

He shook his head on the pillow. "There's something wrong," he said. "I don't expect you to believe me, sir. I only say, there's something wrong—and time will show it."

I left the room. Half an hour later I started for Mr. Beldheimer's house; leaving the arrangements for the morning of the first of March in the hands of the doctor and my wife.

XVI.

THE one thing which principally struck me when I joined the guests at the "Silver Wedding," is also, the one thing which it is necessary to mention here. On this joyful occasion a noticeable lady present was out of spirits. That lady was no other than the heroine of the festival, the mistress of the house!

In the course of the evening I spoke to Mr. Beldheimer's eldest son on the subject of his mother. As an old friend of the family, I had a claim on his confidence which the young man willingly recognised.

"We have had a very disagreeable matter to deal with," he said; "and my mother has not recovered the painful impression left on her mind. Many years since, when my sisters were children, we had an English governess in the house. She left us, as

we then understood, to be married. We heard no more of her until a week or ten days since, when my mother received a letter, in which our ex-governess described herself as being in a condition of great poverty and distress. After much hesitation she had ventured—at the suggestion of a lady who had been kind to her—to write to her former employers, and to appeal to their remembrance of old times. You know my mother: she is not only the most kind-hearted, but the most innocent of women—it is impossible to persuade her of the wickedness that there is in the world. She replied by return of post, inviting the governess to come here and see her, and enclosing the money for her travelling expenses. When my father came home, and heard what had been done, he wrote at once to his agent in London to make enquiries, enclosing the address on the governess's letter. Before he could receive the agent's reply the governess arrived. She produced the worst possible impression on his mind. The agent's letter, arriving a few days later, confirmed his suspicions. Since we had lost sight of her, the woman had led a most disreputable life. My father spoke to her privately: he offered—on condition of her leaving the house—a sum of money to take her back to England. If she refused, the alternative would be an appeal to the authorities and a public scandal. She accepted the money, and left the house. On her way back to England she appears to have stopped at Metz. You will

understand what sort of woman she is, when I tell you that she was seen the other day in a tavern with your handsome groom, Joseph Rigobert."

While my informant was relating these circumstances, my memory was at work. I recalled what Francis Raven had vaguely told us of his wife's experience in former days, as governess in a German family. A suspicion of the truth suddenly flashed across my mind.

"What was the woman's name?" I asked.

Mr. Beldheimer's son answered:

"Alicia Warlock."

I had but one idea when I heard that reply—to get back to my house without a moment's needless delay. It was then ten o'clock at night—the last train to Metz had left long since. I arranged with my young friend—after duly informing him of the circumstances—that I should go by the first train in the morning, instead of staying to breakfast with the other guests who slept in the house.

At intervals during the night I wondered uneasily how things were going on at *Maison Rouge*. Again and again the same question occurred to me, on my journey home in the early morning—the morning of the first of March. As the event proved, but one person in my house knew what really happened at the stables on Francis Raven's birthday. Let Joseph Rigobert take my place as narrator, and tell the story of the end to You—as he told it, in times past, to his lawyer and to Me.

FOURTH (AND LAST) NARRATIVE.

THE STATEMENT OF JOSEPH RIGOBERT : ADDRESSED
TO THE ADVOCATE WHO DEFENDED HIM AT HIS
TRIAL.

RESPECTED SIR,—On the twenty-seventh of February I was sent, on business connected with the stables at Maison Rouge, to the city of Metz. On the public promenade I met a magnificent woman. Complexion blonde. Nationality, English. We mutually admired each other; we fell into conversation. (She spoke French perfectly—with the English accent.) I offered refreshment; my proposal was accepted. We had a long and interesting interview—we discovered that we were made for each other. So far, Who is to blame?

Is it my fault that I am a handsome man—universally agreeable, as such, to the fair sex? Is it a criminal offence to be accessible to the amiable weakness of love? I ask again, Who is to blame? Clearly, nature. Not the beautiful lady—not my humble self.

To resume. The most hard-hearted person

living will understand that two beings made for each other could not possibly part without an appointment to meet again.

I made arrangements for the accommodation of the lady in the village near Maison Rouge. She consented to honour me with her company at supper, in my apartment at the stables, on the night of the twenty-ninth. The time fixed on was the time when the other servants were accustomed to retire—eleven o'clock.

Among the grooms attached to the stables was an Englishman, laid up with a broken leg. His name was Francis. His manners were repulsive; he was ignorant of the French language. In the kitchen he went by the nick-name of the "English Bear." Strange to say, he was a great favourite with my master and my mistress. They even humoured certain superstitious terrors to which this repulsive person was subject—terrors into the nature of which I, as an advanced freethinker, never thought it worth my while to enquire.

On the evening of the twenty-eighth, the Englishman, being a prey to the terrors which I have mentioned, requested that one of his fellow-servants might sit up with him for that night only. The wish that he expressed was backed by Mr. Fairbank's authority. Having already incurred my master's displeasure—in what way, a proper sense of my own dignity forbids me to relate—I volunteered to watch by the bedside of the English Bear.

My object was to satisfy Mr. Fairbank that I bore no malice, on my side, after what had occurred between us. The wretched Englishman passed a night of delirium. Not understanding his barbarous language, I could only gather from his gestures that he was in deadly fear of some fancied apparition at his bedside. From time to time, when this madman disturbed my slumbers, I quieted him by swearing at him. This is the shortest and best way of dealing with persons in his condition.

On the morning of the twenty-ninth, Mr. Fairbank left us on a journey.

Later in the day, to my unspeakable disgust, I found that I had not done with the Englishman yet. In Mr. Fairbank's absence, Mrs. Fairbank took an incomprehensible interest in the question of my delirious fellow-servant's repose at night. Again, one or other of us was to watch by his bedside, and to report it, if anything happened. Expecting my fair friend to supper, it was necessary to make sure that the other servants at the stables would be safe in their beds that night. Accordingly, I volunteered once more to be the man who kept watch. Mrs. Fairbank complimented me on my humanity. I possess great command over my feelings. I accepted the compliment without a blush.

Twice, after nightfall, my mistress and the doctor (this last staying in the house, in Mr. Fairbank's absence) came to make enquiries. Once, *before*

the arrival of my fair friend—and once *after*. On the second occasion (my apartment being next door to the Englishman's) I was obliged to hide my charming guest in the harness room. She consented, with angelic resignation, to immolate her dignity to the servile necessities of my position. A more amiable woman (so far) I never met with!

After the second visit I was left free. It was then close on midnight. Up to that time, there was nothing in the behaviour of the mad Englishman to reward Mrs. Fairbank and the doctor for presenting themselves at his bedside. He lay half awake, half asleep, with an odd, wondering kind of look in his face. My mistress at parting warned me to be particularly watchful of him towards two in the morning. The doctor (in case anything happened) left me a large hand-bell to ring, which could easily be heard at the house.

Restored to the society of my fair friend, I spread the supper-table. A pâté, a sausage, and a few bottles of generous Moselle wine, composed our simple meal. When persons adore each other, the intoxicating illusion of Love transforms the simplest meal into a banquet. With immeasurable capacities for enjoyment, we sat down to table. At the very moment when I placed my fascinating companion in a chair, the infamous Englishman in the next room took that occasion, of all others, to become restless and noisy once more. He struck with his stick on the floor; he cried out, in a delirious access of terror, "Rigobert! Rigobert!"

The sound of that lamentable voice, suddenly assailing our ears, terrified my fair friend. She lost all her charming colour in an instant. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "Who is that in the next room?"

"A mad Englishman."

"An Englishman?"

"Compose yourself, my angel. I will quiet him."

The lamentable voice called out on me again, "Rigobert! Rigobert!"

My fair friend caught me by the arm. "Who is he?" she cried. "What is his name?"

Something in her face struck me as she put that question. A spasm of jealousy shook me to the soul. "You know him?" I said.

"His name!" she vehemently repeated; "his name!"

"Francis," I answered.

"Francis—*what?*"

I shrugged my shoulders. I could neither remember nor pronounce the barbarous English surname. I could only tell her it began with an "R."

She dropped back into the chair. Was she going to faint? No; she recovered, and more than recovered, her lost colour. Her eyes flashed superbly. What did it mean? Profoundly as I understand women in general, I was puzzled by *this* woman!

"You know him?" I repeated.

She laughed at me. "What nonsense! How should I know him? Go and quiet the wretch."

My looking-glass was near. One glance at it satisfied me that no woman in her senses could prefer the Englishman to Me. I recovered my self-respect. I hastened to the Englishman's bedside.

The moment I appeared he pointed eagerly towards my room. He overwhelmed me with a torrent of words in his own language. I made out, from his gestures and his looks, that he had, in some incomprehensible manner, discovered the presence of my guest; and, stranger still, that he was scared by the idea of a person in my room. I endeavoured to compose him, on the system which I have already mentioned—that is to say, I swore at him in *my* language. The result not proving satisfactory, I own I shook my fist in his face, and left the bedchamber.

Returning to my fair friend, I found her walking backwards and forwards in a state of excitement wonderful to behold. She had not waited for me to fill her glass—she had begun the generous Moselle in my absence. I prevailed on her with difficulty to place herself at the table. Nothing would induce her to eat. "My appetite is gone," she said. "Give me wine."

The generous Moselle deserves its name—delicate on the palate, with prodigious "body." The

strength of this fine wine produced no stupefying effect on my remarkable guest. It appeared to strengthen and exhilarate her—nothing more. She always spoke in the same low tone, and always, turn the conversation as I might, brought it back with the same dexterity to the subject of the Englishman in the next room. In any other woman this persistency would have offended me. My lovely guest was irresistible; I answered her questions with the docility of a child. She possessed all the amusing eccentricity of her nation. When I told her of the accident which confined the Englishman to his bed, she sprang to her feet. An extraordinary smile irradiated her countenance. She said, "Show me the horse who broke the Englishman's leg! I must see that horse!" I took her to the stables. She kissed the horse—on my word of honour, she kissed the horse! That struck me. I said, "You *do* know the man; and he has wronged you in some way." No! she would not admit it, even then. "I kiss all beautiful animals," she said. "Haven't I kissed *you*?" With that charming explanation of her conduct, she ran back up the stairs. I only remained behind to lock the stable door again. When I rejoined her, I made a startling discovery. I caught her coming out of the Englishman's room.

"I was just going downstairs again to call you," she said. "The man in there is getting noisy once more."

The mad Englishman's voice assailed our ears again.

"Rigobert! Rigobert!"

He was a frightful object to look at when I saw him this time. His eyes were staring wildly; the perspiration was pouring over his face. In a panic of terror he clasped his hands; he pointed up to heaven. By every sign and gesture that a man can make, he entreated me not to leave him again. I really could not help smiling. The idea of my staying with *him*, and leaving my fair friend by herself in the next room!

I turned to the door. When the mad wretch saw me leaving him he burst out into a screech of despair—so shrill that I feared it might awaken the sleeping servants.

My presence of mind in emergencies is proverbial among those who know me. I tore open the cupboard in which he kept his linen—seized a handful of his handkerchiefs—gagged him with one of them, and secured his hands with the others. There was now no danger of his alarming the servants. After tying the last knot, I looked up.

The door between the Englishman's room and mine was open. My fair friend was standing on the threshold—watching *him* as he lay helpless on the bed; watching *me* as I tied the last knot.

"What are you doing there?" I asked. "Why did you open the door?"

She stepped up to me, and whispered her answer

in my ear, with her eyes all the time upon the man on the bed.

“I heard him scream.”

“Well?”

“I thought you had killed him.”

I drew back from her in horror. The suspicion of me which her words implied was sufficiently detestable in itself. But her manner when she uttered the words was more revolting still. It so powerfully affected me that I started back from that beautiful creature, as I might have recoiled from a reptile crawling over my flesh.

Before I had recovered myself sufficiently to reply, my nerves were assailed by another shock. I suddenly heard my mistress's voice, calling to me from the stable yard.

There was no time to think—there was only time to act. The one thing needed was to keep Mrs. Fairbank from ascending the stairs, and discovering — not my lady-guest only — but the Englishman also, gagged and bound on his bed. I instantly hurried to the yard. As I ran down the stairs I heard the stable clock strike the quarter to two in the morning.

My mistress was eager and agitated. The doctor (in attendance on her) was smiling to himself, like a man amused at his own thoughts.

“Is Francis awake or asleep?” Mrs. Fairbank enquired.

“He has been a little restless, madam. But he

is now quiet again. If he is not disturbed" (I added those words to prevent her from ascending the stairs), "he will soon fall off into a quiet sleep."

"Has nothing happened since I was here last?"

"Nothing, madam."

The doctor lifted his eyebrows with a comical look of distress.

"Alas, alas, Mrs. Fairbank!" he said. "Nothing has happened! The days of romance are over!"

"It is not two o'clock yet," my mistress answered, a little irritably.

The smell of the stables was strong on the morning air. She put her handkerchief to her nose and led the way out of the yard, by the north entrance—the entrance communicating with the gardens and the house. I was ordered to follow her, along with the doctor. Once out of the smell of the stables, she began to question me again. She was unwilling to believe that nothing had occurred in her absence. I invented the best answers I could think of on the spur of the moment; and the doctor stood by, laughing. So the minutes passed, till the clock struck two. Upon that, Mrs. Fairbank announced her intention of personally visiting the Englishman in his room. To my great relief, the doctor interfered to stop her from doing this.

"You have heard that Francis is just falling asleep," he said. "If you enter his room you

may disturb him. It is essential to the success of my experiment that he should have a good night's rest, and that he should own it himself, before I tell him the truth. I must request, madam, that you will not disturb the man. Rigobert will ring the alarm bell if anything happens."

My mistress was unwilling to yield. For the next five minutes at least, there was a warm discussion between the two. In the end, Mrs. Fairbank was obliged to give way—for the time. "In half an hour," she said, "Francis will either be sound asleep, or awake again. In half an hour I shall come back." She took the doctor's arm. They returned together to the house.

Left by myself, with half an hour before me, I resolved to take the Englishwoman back to the village—then, returning to the stables, to remove the gag and the bindings from Francis, and to let him screech to his heart's content. What would his alarming the whole establishment matter to *me*, after I had got rid of the compromising presence of my guest?

Returning to the yard I heard a sound like the creaking of an open door on its hinges. The gate of the north entrance I had just closed with my own hand. I went round to the west entrance, at the back of the stables. It opened on a field crossed by two footpaths, in Mr. Fairbank's grounds. The nearest footpath led to the village. The other led to the high road and the river.

Arriving at the west entrance I found the door open—swinging to and fro slowly in the fresh morning breeze. I had myself locked and bolted that door after admitting my fair friend at eleven o'clock. A vague dread of something wrong stole its way into my mind. I hurried back to the stables.

I looked into my own room. It was empty. I went to the harness-room. Not a sign of the woman was there. I returned to my room, and approached the door of the Englishman's bed-chamber. Was it possible that she had remained there during my absence? An unaccountable reluctance to open the door made me hesitate, with my hand on the lock. I listened. There was not a sound inside. I called softly. There was no answer. I drew back a step, still hesitating. I noticed something dark, moving slowly in the crevice between the bottom of the door and the boarded floor. Snatching up the candle from the table, I held it low, and looked. The dark, slowly-moving object was a stream of blood!

That horrid sight roused me. I opened the door.

The Englishman lay on his bed—alone in the room. He was stabbed in two places—in the throat and in the heart. The weapon was left in the second wound. It was a knife of English manufacture, with a handle of buck-horn as good as new.

I instantly gave the alarm. Witnesses can speak

are *in* you, let the wise words of the greatest of
all poets be explanation enough :

“ We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.”

THE END OF THE DREAM WOMAN.

JOHN JAGO'S GHOST;

OR,

THE DEAD ALIVE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE SICK MAN.

"HEART all right," said the doctor. "Lungs all right. No organic disease that I can discover. Philip Lefrank, don't alarm yourself. You are not going to die yet. The disease you are suffering from is—overwork. The remedy in your case is—rest."

So the doctor spoke, in my chambers in the Temple (London); having been sent for to see me about half an hour after I had alarmed my clerk by fainting at my desk. I have no wish to intrude myself needlessly on the reader's attention; but it may be necessary to add, in the way of explanation, that I am a "junior" barrister in good practice. I come from the Channel Island of Jersey. The French spelling of my name (Lefranc) was Anglicised generations since, in the days when the letter "k" was still used in England at the end of words which now terminate in "c." We hold our heads high, nevertheless, as a Jersey family. It is to this

day a trial to my father to hear his son described as a member of the English bar.

"Rest!" I repeated, when my medical adviser had done. "My good friend, are you aware that it is term time? The courts are sitting. Look at the briefs waiting for me on that table! Rest means ruin in my case."

"And work," added the doctor, quietly, "means death."

I started. He was not trying to frighten me: he was plainly in earnest.

"It is merely a question of time," he went on. "You have a fine constitution; you are a young man; but you cannot deliberately overwork your brain, and derange your nervous system, much longer. Go away at once. If you are a good sailor, take a sea-voyage. The ocean-air is the best of all air to build you up again. No: I don't want to write a prescription. I decline to physic you. I have no more to say."

With those words my medical friend left the room. I was obstinate: I went into court the same day.

The senior counsel in the case on which I was engaged applied to me for some information which it was my duty to give him. To my horror and amazement, I was perfectly unable to collect my ideas: facts and dates all mingled together confusedly in my mind. I was led out of court thoroughly terrified about myself. The next day my

briefs went back to the attorneys; and I followed my doctor's advice by taking my passage for America in the first steamer that sailed for New York.

I had chosen the voyage to America in preference to any other trip by sea, with a special object in view. A relative of my mother's had emigrated to the United States many years since, and had thriven there as a farmer. He had given me a general invitation to visit him if I ever crossed the Atlantic. The long period of inaction, under the name of *rest*, to which the doctor's decision had condemned me, could hardly be more pleasantly occupied, as I thought, than by paying a visit to my relation, and seeing what I could of America in that way. After a brief sojourn at New York, I started by railway for the residence of my host—Mr. Isaac Meadowcroft, of Morwick Farm.

There are some of the grandest natural prospects on the face of creation in America. There is also to be found in certain States of the Union, by way of wholesome contrast, scenery as flat, as monotonous, and as uninteresting to the traveller, as any that the earth can show. The part of the country in which Mr. Meadowcroft's farm was situated fell within this latter category. I looked round me when I stepped out of the railway-carriage on the platform at Morwick Station; and I said to myself, "If to be cured means, in my case, to be dull, I have accurately picked out the very place for the purpose."

I look back at those words by the light of later events; and I pronounce them, as you will soon pronounce them, to be the words of an essentially rash man, whose hasty judgment never stopped to consider what surprises time and chance together might have in store for him.

Mr. Meadowcroft's eldest son, Ambrose, was waiting at the station to drive me to the farm.

There was no forewarning, in the appearance of Ambrose Meadowcroft, of the strange and terrible events that were to follow my arrival at Morwick. A healthy, handsome young fellow, one of thousands of other healthy, handsome young fellows, said, "How d'ye do, Mr. Lefrank? Glad to see you, sir. Jump into the buggy: the man will look after your portmanteau." With equally conventional politeness I answered, "Thank you. How are you all at home?" So we started on the way to the farm.

Our conversation on the drive began with the subjects of agriculture and breeding. I displayed my total ignorance of crops and cattle before we had travelled ten yards on our journey. Ambrose Meadowcroft cast about for another topic, and failed to find it. Upon this I cast about on my side, and asked, at a venture, if I had chosen a convenient time for my visit. The young farmer's stolid brown face instantly brightened. I had evidently hit, hap-hazard, on an interesting subject.

"You couldn't have chosen a better time," he

said. "Our house has never been so cheerful as it is now."

"Have you any visitors staying with you?"

"It's not exactly a visitor. It's a new member of the family who has come to live with us."

"A new member of the family? May I ask who it is?"

Ambrose Meadowcroft considered before he replied; touched his horse with the whip; looked at me with a certain sheepish hesitation; and suddenly burst out with the truth, in the plainest possible words:—

"It's just the nicest girl, sir, you ever saw in your life."

"Ay ay! A friend of your sister's, I suppose?"

"A friend? Bless your heart! it's our little American cousin—Naomi Colebrook."

I vaguely remembered that a younger sister of Mr. Meadowcroft's had married an American merchant in the remote past, and had died many years since, leaving an only child. I was now further informed that the father also was dead. In his last moments he had committed his helpless daughter to the compassionate care of his wife's relations at Morwick.

"He was always a speculating man," Ambrose went on. "Tried one thing after another, and failed in all. Died, sir, leaving barely enough to bury him. My father was a little doubtful, before she came here, how his American niece would turn

out. We are English, you know ; and, though we do live in the United States, we stick fast to our English ways and habits. We don't much like American women in general, I can tell you ; but when Naomi made her appearance, she conquered us all. Such a girl ! Took her place as one of the family directly. Learnt to make herself useful in the dairy in a week's time. I tell you this—she hasn't been with us quite two months yet ; and we wonder already how we ever got on without her !”

Once started on the subject of Naomi Colebrook, Ambrose held to that one topic, and talked on it without intermission. It required no great gift of penetration to discover the impression which the American cousin had produced in this case. The young fellow's enthusiasm communicated itself, in a certain tepid degree, to me. I really felt a mild flutter of anticipation at the prospect of seeing Naomi, when we drew up, towards the close of evening, at the gates of Morwick Farm.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW FACES.

IMMEDIATELY on my arrival, I was presented to Mr. Meadowcroft, the father.

The old man had become a confirmed invalid, confined by chronic rheumatism to his chair. He received me kindly, and a little wearily as well.

His only unmarried daughter (he had long since been left a widower) was in the room, in attendance on her father. She was a melancholy, middle-aged woman, without visible attractions of any sort—one of those persons who appear to accept the obligation of living, under protest, as a burden which they would never have consented to bear if they had only been consulted first. We three had a dreary little interview in a parlour of bare walls; and then I was permitted to go upstairs, and unpack my portmanteau in my own room.

“Supper will be at nine o’clock, sir,” said Miss Meadowcroft.

She pronounced those words as if “supper” was a form of domestic offence, habitually committed by the men, and endured by the women. I followed the groom up to my room, not over well pleased with my first experience of the farm.

No Naomi, and no romance, thus far!

My room was clean—oppressively clear. I quite longed to see a little dust somewhere. My library was limited to the Bible and the Prayer-book. My view from the window showed me a dead flat in a partial state of cultivation, fading sadly from view in the waning light. Above the head of my spruce white bed hung a scroll, bearing a damnatory quotation from Scripture in emblazoned letters of red and black. The dismal presence of Miss Meadowcroft had passed over my bedroom,

and had blighted it. My spirits sank as I looked round me. Supper-time was still an event in the future. I lit the candles, and took from my portmanteau what I firmly believe to have been the first French novel ever produced at Morwick Farm. It was one of the masterly and charming stories of Dumas the elder. In five minutes I was in a new world, and my melancholy room was full of the liveliest French company. The sound of an imperative and uncompromising bell recalled me in due time to the regions of reality. I looked at my watch. Nine o'clock.

Ambrose met me at the bottom of the stairs, and showed me the way to the supper-room.

Mr. Meadowcroft's invalid-chair had been wheeled to the head of the table. On his right-hand side sat his sad and silent daughter. She signed to me, with a ghostly solemnity, to take the vacant place on the left of her father. Silas Meadowcroft came in at the same moment, and was presented to me by his brother. There was a strong family likeness between them, Ambrose being the taller and the handsomer man of the two. But there was no marked character in either face. I set them down as men with undeveloped qualities, waiting (the good and evil qualities alike) for time and circumstances to bring them to their full growth.

The door opened again while I was still studying the two brothers, without, I honestly confess, being very favourably impressed by either of them. A

new member of the family-circle, who instantly attracted my attention, entered the room.

He was short, spare, and wiry ; singularly pale for a person whose life was passed in the country. The face was in other respects, beside this, a striking face to see. As to the lower part, it was covered with a thick black beard and moustache, at a time when shaving was the rule, and beards the rare exception, in America. As to the upper part of the face, it was irradiated by a pair of wild, glittering brown eyes, the expression of which suggested to me that there was something not quite right with the man's mental balance. A perfectly sane person in all his sayings and doings, so far as I could see, there was still something in those wild brown eyes which suggested to me, that, under exceptionally trying circumstances, he might surprise his oldest friends by acting in some exceptionally violent or foolish way. "A little cracked"—that, in the popular phrase, was my impression of the stranger who now made his appearance in the supper-room.

Mr. Meadowcroft the elder, having not spoken one word thus far, himself introduced the newcomer to me, with a side-glance at his sons, which had something like defiance in it—a glance which, as I was sorry to notice, was returned with a similar appearance of defiance by the two young men.

"Philip Lefrank, this is my overlooker, Mr. Jago," said the old man, formally presenting us.

“John Jago, this is my young relative by marriage, Mr. Lefrank. He is not well! he has come over the ocean for rest, and change of scene. Mr. Jago is an American, Philip. I hope you have no prejudice against Americans. Make acquaintance with Mr. Jago. Sit together.” He cast another dark look at his sons; and the sons again returned it. They pointedly drew back from John Jago as he approached the empty chair next to me, and moved round to the opposite side of the table. It was plain that the man with the beard stood high in the father’s favour, and that he was cordially disliked for that or for some other reason by the sons.

The door opened once more. A young lady quietly joined the party at the supper-table.

Was the young lady Naomi Colebrook? I looked at Ambrose, and saw the answer in his face. Naomi at last!

A pretty girl, and so far as I could judge by appearances, a good girl too. Describing her generally, I may say that she had a small head, well carried, and well set on her shoulders; bright grey eyes, that looked at you honestly, and meant what they looked; a trim, slight little figure—too slight for our English notions of beauty; a strong American accent; and (a rare thing in America) a pleasantly-toned voice, which made the accent agreeable to English ears. Our first impressions of people are, in nine cases out of ten, the right impressions. I

liked Naomi Colebrook at first sight; liked her pleasant smile; liked her hearty shake of the hand when we were presented to each other. "If I get on well with nobody else in this house," I thought to myself, "I shall certainly get on well with *you*."

For once in a way, I prove a true prophet. In the atmosphere of smouldering enmities at Morwick Farm, the pretty American girl and I remained firm and true friends from first to last.

Ambrose made room for Naomi to sit between his brother and himself. She changed colour for a moment, and looked at him, with a pretty reluctant tenderness, as she took her chair. I strongly suspected the young farmer of squeezing her hand privately, under cover of the tablecloth.

The supper was not a merry one. The only cheerful conversation was the conversation across the table between Naomi and me.

For some incomprehensible reason, John Jago seemed to be ill at ease in the presence of his young countrywoman. He looked up at Naomi doubtfully from his plate, and looked down again slowly with a frown. When I addressed him, he answered constrainedly. Even when he spoke to Mr. Meadowcroft, he was still on his guard—on his guard against the two young men, as I fancied by the direction which his eyes took on these occasions. When we began our meal, I had noticed for the first time that Silas Meadowcroft's left hand was strapped up with surgical plaster; and I now

further observed that John Jago's wandering brown eyes, furtively looking at everybody round the table in turn, looked with a curious cynical scrutiny at the young man's injured hand.

By way of making my first evening at the farm all the more embarrassing to me as a stranger, I discovered before long that the father and sons were talking indirectly *at* each other, through Mr. Jago and through me. When old Mr. Meadowcroft spoke disparagingly to his overlooker of some past mistake made in the cultivation of the arable land of the farm, old Mr. Meadowcroft's eyes pointed the application of his hostile criticism straight in the direction of his two sons. When the two sons seized a stray remark of mine about animals in general, and applied it satirically to the mismanagement of sheep and oxen in particular, they looked at John Jago, while they talked to me. On occasions of this sort—and they happened frequently—Naomi struck in resolutely at the right moment, and turned the talk to some harmless topic. Every time she took a prominent part in this way in keeping the peace, melancholy Miss Meadowcroft looked slowly round at her in stern and silent disparagement of her interference. A more dreary and more disunited family-party I never sat at the table with. Envy, hatred, malice, and uncharitableness are never so essentially detestable to my mind as when they are animated by a sense of propriety, and work under the surface. But for my interest

in Naomi, and my other interest in the little love-looks which I now and then surprised passing between her and Ambrose, I should never have sat through that supper. I should certainly have taken refuge in my French novel and my own room.

At last the unendurably long meal, served with ostentatious profusion, was at an end. Miss Meadowcroft rose with her ghostly solemnity, and granted me my dismissal in these words:—

“We are early people at the farm, Mr. Lefrank. I wish you good-night.”

She laid her bony hands on the back of Mr. Meadowcroft's invalid-chair, cut him short in his farewell salutation to me, and wheeled him out to his bed as if she were wheeling him out to his grave.

“Do you go to your room immediately, sir? If not, may I offer you a cigar?—provided the young gentlemen will permit it.”

So, picking his words with painful deliberation, and pointing his reference to “the young gentlemen” with one sardonic side-look at them, Mr. John Jago performed the duties of hospitality on his side. I excused myself from accepting the cigar. With studied politeness, the man of the glittering brown eyes wished me a good night's rest, and left the room.

Ambrose and Silas both approached me hospitably, with their open cigar-cases in their hands.

"You were quite right to say 'No,'" Ambrose began. "Never smoke with John Jago. His cigars will poison you."

"And never believe a word John Jago says to you," added Silas. "He is the greatest liar in America, let the other be whom he may."

Naomi shook her forefinger reproachfully at them, as if the two sturdy young farmers had been two children.

"What will Mr. Lefrank think," she said, "if you talk in that way of a person whom your father respects and trusts? Go and smoke. I am ashamed of both of you."

Silas slunk away without a word of protest. Ambrose stood his ground, evidently bent on making his peace with Naomi before he left her.

Seeing that I was in the way, I walked aside towards a glass door at the lower end of the room. The door opened on the trim little farm-garden, bathed at that moment in lovely moonlight. I stepped out to enjoy the scene, and found my way to a seat under an elm-tree. The grand repose of Nature had never looked so unutterably solemn and beautiful as it now appeared, after what I had seen and heard inside the house. I understood, or thought I understood, the sad despair of humanity which led men into monasteries in the old time. The misanthropical side of my nature (where is the sick man who is not conscious of that side of him?) was fast getting the upper hand of me—when I felt a light

touch laid on my shoulder, and found myself reconciled to my species once more by Naomi Colebrook.

CHAPTER III.

THE MOONLIGHT-MEETING.

"I WANT to speak to you," Naomi began. "You don't think ill of me for following you out here? We are not accustomed to stand much on ceremony in America."

"You are quite right in America. Pray sit down."

She seated herself by my side, looking at me frankly and fearlessly by the light of the moon.

"You are related to the family here," she resumed, "and I am related too. I guess I may say to *you* what I couldn't say to a stranger. I am right glad you have come here, Mr. Lefrank; and for a reason, sir, which you don't suspect."

"Thank you for the compliment you pay me Miss Colebrook, whatever the reason may be."

She took no notice of my reply: she steadily pursued her own train of thought.

"I guess you may do some good, sir, in this wretched house," the girl went on, with her eyes still fixed earnestly on my face. "There is no love, no trust no peace at Morwick Farm. They want somebody here—except Ambrose: don't think ill of Ambrose; he is only thoughtless—I say, the rest of them

want somebody here to make them ashamed of their hard hearts, and their horrid, false, envious ways. You are a gentleman; you know more than they know: they can't help themselves, they must look up to *you*. Try, Mr. Lefrank, when you have the opportunity—pray try, sir, to make peace among them. You heard what went on at supper-time; and you were disgusted with it. Oh, yes, you were! I saw you frown to yourself; and I know what *that* means in you Englishmen."

There was no choice but to speak one's mind plainly to Naomi. I acknowledged the impression which had been produced on me at supper-time just as plainly as I have acknowledged it in these pages. Naomi nodded her head in undisguised approval of my candour.

"That will do; that's speaking out," she said. "But—oh, my! you put it a deal too mildly, sir, when you say the men don't seem to be on friendly terms together here. They hate each other. That's the word, Mr. Lefrank—hate; bitter, bitter, bitter hate!" She clenched her little fists; she shook them vehemently, by way of adding emphasis to her last words; and then she suddenly remembered Ambrose. "Except Ambrose," she added, opening her hand again, and laying it very earnestly on my arm. "Don't go and misjudge Ambrose, sir. There is no harm in poor Ambrose."

The girl's innocent frankness was really irresistible.

“Should I be altogether wrong,” I asked, “if I guessed that you were a little partial to Ambrose?”

An Englishwoman would have felt, or would at least have assumed, some little hesitation at replying to my question. Naomi did not hesitate for an instant.

“You are quite right, sir,” she said, with the most perfect composure. “If things go well, I mean to marry Ambrose.”

“If things go well,” I repeated. “What does that mean? Money?”

She shook her head.

“It means a fear that I have in my own mind,” she answered—“a fear, Mr. Lefrank, of matters taking a bad turn among the men here—the wicked, hard-hearted, unfeeling men. I don’t mean Ambrose, sir: I mean his brother Silas, and John Jago. Did you notice Silas’s hand? John Jago did that, sir, with a knife.”

“By accident?” I asked.

“On purpose,” she answered. “In return for a blow.”

This plain revelation of the state of things at Morwick Farm rather staggered me. Blows and knives under the rich and respectable roof-tree of old Mr. Meadowcroft!—blows and knives not among the labourers, but among the masters! My first impression was like *your* first impression, no doubt. I could hardly believe it.

“Are you sure of what you say?” I enquired,

"I have it from Ambrose. Ambrose would never deceive me. Ambrose knows all about it."

My curiosity was powerfully excited. To what sort of household had I rashly voyaged across the ocean in search of rest and quiet ?

"May I know all about it too ?" I said.

"Well, I will try and tell you what Ambrose told me. But you must promise me one thing first, sir. Promise you won't go away and leave us when you know the whole truth. Shake hands on it, Mr. Lefrank ; come, shake hands on it."

There was no resisting her fearless frankness. I shook hands on it. Naomi entered on her narrative the moment I had given her my pledge, without wasting a word by way of preface.

"When you are shown over the farm here," she began, "you will see that it is really two farms in one. On this side of it, as we look from under this tree, they raise crops : on the other side—on much the larger half of the land, mind—they raise cattle. When Mr. Meadowcroft got too old and too sick to look after his farm himself, the boys (I mean Ambrose and Silas) divided the work between them. Ambrose looked after the crops, and Silas after the cattle. Things didn't go well, somehow, under their management. I can't tell you why. I am only sure Ambrose was not in fault. The old man got more and more dissatisfied, especially about his beasts. His pride is in his beasts. Without saying a word to the boys, he looked about pri-

vately (*I think he was wrong in that, sir; don't you?*)—he looked about privately for help; and, in an evil hour, he heard of John Jago. Do you like John Jago, Mr. Lefrank?"

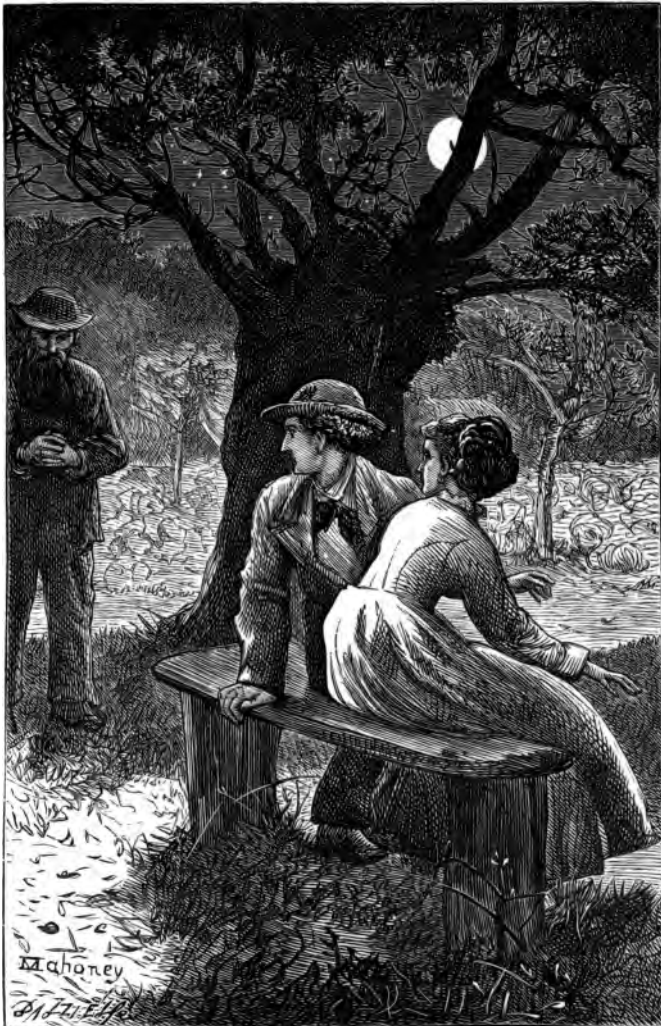
"So far, no. I don't like him."

"Just my sentiments, sir. But I don't know: it's likely we may be wrong. There's nothing against John Jago, except that he is so odd in his ways. They do say he wears all that nasty hair on his face (*I hate hair on a man's face*) on account of a vow he made when he lost his wife. Don't you think, Mr. Lefrank, a man must be a little mad who shows his grief at losing his wife by vowing that he will never shave himself again? Well, that's what they do say John Jago vowed. Perhaps it's a lie. People are such liars here! Anyway, it's truth (*the boys themselves confess that*), when John came to the farm he came with a first-rate character. The old father here isn't easy to please; and he pleased the old father. Yes, that's so. Mr. Meadowcroft don't like my countrymen in general. He's like his sons—English, bitter English, to the marrow of his bones. Somehow, in spite of that, John Jago got round him; maybe because John does certainly know his business. Oh, yes! Cattle and crops, John knows his business. Since he's been overlooker, things have prospered as they didn't prosper in the time of the boys. Ambrose owned as much to me himself. Still, sir, it's hard to be set aside for a stranger;

isn't it? John gives the orders now. The boys do the work; but they have no voice in it when John and the old man put their heads together over the business of the farm. I have been long in telling you of it, sir; but now you know how the envy and the hatred grew among the men, before my time. Since I have been here, things seem to get worse and worse. There's hardly a day goes by that hard words don't pass between the boys and John, or the boys and their father. The old man has an aggravating way, Mr. Lefrank—a nasty way, as we do call it—of taking John Jago's part. Do speak to him about it when you get the chance. The main blame of the quarrel between Silas and John the other day lies at his door, I think. I don't want to excuse Silas, either. It was brutal of him—though he *is* Ambrose's brother—to strike John, who is the smaller and weaker man of the two. But it was worse than brutal in John, to out with his knife, and try to stab Silas. Oh, he did it! If Silas had not caught the knife in his hand (his hand's awfully cut, I can tell you: I dressed it myself), it might have ended, for anything I know, in murder——”

She stopped as the word passed her lips, looked back over her shoulder, and started violently.

I looked where my companion was looking. The dark figure of a man was standing, watching us, in the shadow of the elm-tree. I rose directly to approach him. Naomi recovered her self-possession, and checked me before I could interfere.



"I looked where my companion was looking. The dark figure of a man was standing, watching us, in the shadow of the lime-tree."—p. 250

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"Who are you?" she asked, turning sharply towards the stranger. "What do you want there?"

The man stepped out from the shadow into the moonlight, and stood revealed to us as John Jago.

"I hope I am not intruding?" he said, looking hard at me.

"What do you want?" Naomi repeated.

"I don't wish to disturb you, or to disturb this gentleman," he proceeded. "When you are quite at leisure, Miss Naomi, you would be doing me a favour if you would permit me to say a few words to you in private."

He spoke with the most scrupulous politeness; trying, and trying vainly, to conceal some strong agitation which was in possession of him. His wild brown eyes—wilder than ever in the moonlight—rested entreatingly, with a strange underlying expression of despair, on Naomi's face. His hands, clasped tightly in front of him, trembled incessantly. Little as I liked the man, he did really impress me as a pitiable object at that moment.

"Do you mean that you want to speak to me to-night?" Naomi asked, in undisguised surprise.

"Yes, miss, if you please, at your leisure and at Mr. Lefrank's."

Naomi hesitated.

"Won't it keep till to-morrow?" she said.

"I shall be away on farm-business to-morrow, miss, for the whole day. Please to give me a few

minutes this evening." He advanced a step towards her : his voice faltered, and dropped timidly to a whisper. " I really have something to say to you, Miss Naomi. It would be a kindness on your part—a very, very great kindness—if you will let me say it before I rest to-night."

I rose again to resign my place to him. Once more Naomi checked me.

" No," she said. " Don't stir." She addressed John Jago very reluctantly : " If you are so much in earnest about it, Mr. John, I suppose it must be. I can't guess what *you* can possibly have to say to me which cannot be said before a third person. However, it wouldn't be civil, I suppose, to say 'No' in my place. You know it's my business to wind up the hall-clock at ten every night. If you choose to come and help me, the chances are that we shall have the hall to ourselves. Will that do ?"

" Not in the hall, miss, if you will excuse me."

" Not in the hall !"

" And not in the house either, if I may make so bold."

" What do you mean ?" She turned impatiently, and appealed to me. " Do *you* understand him ?"

John Jago signed to me imploringly to let him answer for himself.

" Bear with me, Miss Naomi," he said. " I think I can make you understand me. There are eyes on the watch, and ears on the watch, in the house ;

and there are some footsteps—I won't say whose—so soft, that no person can hear them.”

The last allusion evidently made itself understood. Naomi stopped him before he could say more.

“Well, where is it to be?” she asked, resignedly. “Will the garden do, Mr. John?”

“Thank you kindly, miss: the garden will do.” He pointed to a gravel-walk beyond us, bathed in the full flood of the moonlight. “There,” he said, “where we can see all round us, and be sure that nobody is listening. At ten o'clock.” He paused, and addressed himself to me. “I beg to apologise, sir, for intruding myself on your conversation. Please to excuse me.”

His eyes rested with a last anxious pleading look on Naomi's face. He bowed to us, and melted away into the shadow of the tree. The distant sound of a door, closed softly, came to us through the stillness of the night. John Jago had re-entered the house.

Now that he was out of hearing, Naomi spoke to me very earnestly:—

“Don't suppose, sir, I have any secrets with *him*,” she said. “I know no more than you do what he wants with me. I have half a mind not to keep the appointment. It's close on ten now. What would you do in my place?”

“Having made the appointment,” I answered, “it seems to be due to yourself to keep it. If you

feel the slightest alarm, I will wait in another part of the garden, so that I can hear if you call me."

She received my proposal with a saucy toss of the head, and a smile of pity for my ignorance.

"You are a stranger, Mr. Lefrank, or you would never talk to me in that way. In America, we don't do the men the honour of letting them alarm us. In America, the women take care of themselves. He has got my promise to meet him, as you say; and I must keep my promise. Only think," she added, speaking more to herself than to me, "of John Jago finding out Miss Meadowcroft's nasty, sly, underhand ways in the house! Most men would never have noticed her!"

I was completely taken by surprise. Sad and severe Miss Meadowcroft a listener and a spy! What next at Morwick Farm?

"Was that hint at the watchful eyes and ears, and the soft footsteps, really an allusion to Mr. Meadowcroft's daughter?" I asked.

"Of course it was. Ah! she has imposed on you as she imposes on everybody else. The false wretch! She is secretly at the bottom of half the bad feeling among the men. I am certain of it—she keeps Mr. Meadowcroft's mind bitter towards the boys. Old as she is, Mr. Lefrank, and ugly as she is, she wouldn't object (if she could only make him ask her) to be John Jago's second wife. No, sir; and she wouldn't break her heart if the boys

were not left a stick or a stone on the farm when the father dies. I have watched her, and I know it. Ah! I could tell you such things. But there's no time now—there's ten o'clock striking! we must say good-night. I am right glad I have spoken to you, sir. I say again, at parting, what I have said already: Use your influence, pray use your influence, to soften them, and to make them ashamed of themselves, in this wicked house. We will have more talk about what you can do tomorrow, when you are shown over the farm. Say, good-bye now; I must keep my appointment. Look! here is John Jago stealing out again in the shadow of the tree! Good-night, friend Lefrank; and pleasant dreams."

With one hand she took mine, and pressed it cordially: with the other she pushed me away without ceremony in the direction of the house. A charming girl!—an irresistible girl! I was nearly as bad as the boys. I declare, *I* almost hated John Jago, too, as we crossed each other in the shadow of the tree.

Arrived at the glass door, I stopped, and looked back at the gravel-walk.

They had met. I saw the two shadowy figures slowly pacing backwards and forwards in the moonlight, the woman a little in advance of the man. What was he saying to her? Why was he so anxious that not a word of it should be heard? Our presentiments are sometimes, in certain rare

cases, the faithful prophecy of the future. A vague distrust of that moonlight-meeting stealthily took a hold on my mind. "Will mischief come of it?" I asked myself, as I closed the door and entered the house.

Mischief *did* come of it. You shall hear how.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEECHEN STICK.

PERSONS of sensitive nervous temperament, sleeping for the first time in a strange house, and in a bed that is new to them, must make up their minds to pass a wakeful night. My first night at Morwick Farm was no exception to this rule. The little sleep I had was broken and disturbed by dreams. Towards six o'clock in the morning my bed became unendurable to me. The sun was shining in brightly at the window. I determined to try the reviving influence of a stroll in the fresh morning air.

Just as I got out of bed, I heard footsteps and voices under my window.

The footsteps stopped, and the voices became recognisable. I had passed the night with my window open : I was able, without exciting notice from below, to look out.

The persons beneath me were Silas Meadowcroft, John Jago, and three strangers, whose dress and

appearance indicated plainly enough that they were labourers on the farm. Silas was swinging a stout beechen stick in his hand, and was speaking to Jago, coarsely and insolently enough, of his moonlight-meeting with Naomi on the previous night.

“Next time you go courting a young lady in secret,” said Silas, “make sure that the moon goes down first, or wait for a cloudy sky. You were seen in the garden, Master Jago; and you may as well tell us the truth for once in a way. Did you find her open to persuasion, sir? Did she say ‘Yes?’”

John Jago kept his temper.

“If you must have your joke, Mr. Silas,” he said, quietly and firmly, “be pleased to joke on some other subject. You are quite wrong, sir, in what you suppose to have passed between the young lady and me.”

Silas turned about, and addressed himself ironically to the three labourers.

“You hear him, boys? He can’t tell the truth, try him as you may. He wasn’t making love to Naomi in the garden last night—oh, dear, no! He has had one wife already; and he knows better than to take the yoke on his shoulders for the second time!”

Greatly to my surprise, John Jago met this clumsy jesting with a formal and serious reply.

“You are quite right, sir,” he said. “I have no

intention of marrying for the second time. What I was saying to Miss Naomi doesn't matter to you. It was not at all what you choose to suppose ; it was something of quite another kind, with which you have no concern. Be pleased to understand once for all, Mr. Silas, that not so much as the thought of making love to the young lady has ever entered my head. I respect her ; I admire her good qualities : but if she was the only woman left in the world, and if I was a much younger man than I am, I should never think of asking her to be my wife." He burst out suddenly into a harsh uneasy laugh. " No, no ! not my style, Mr. Silas—not my style !"

Something in those words, or in his manner of speaking them, appeared to exasperate Silas. He dropped his clumsy irony, and addressed himself directly to John Jago in a tone of savage contempt.

" Not your style ?" he repeated. " Upon my soul, that's a cool way of putting it, for a man in your place ! What do you mean by calling her ' not your style ' ? You impudent beggar ! Naomi Colebrook is meat for your master !"

John Jago's temper began to give way at last. He approached defiantly a step or two nearer to Silas Meadowcroft.

" Who is my master ?" he asked.

" Ambrose will show you, if you go to him," answered the other. " Naomi is *his* sweetheart, not

mine. Keep out of his way, if you want to keep a whole skin on your bones."

John Jago cast one of his sardonic sidelooks at the farmer's wounded left hand. "Don't forget your own skin, Mr. Silas, when you threaten mine! I have set my mark on you once, sir. Let me by on my business, or I may mark you for a second time."

Silas lifted his beechen stick. The labourers, roused to some rude sense of the serious turn which the quarrel was taking, got between the two men, and parted them. I had been hurriedly dressing myself while the altercation was proceeding; and I now ran downstairs to try what my influence could do towards keeping the peace at Morwick Farm.

The war of angry words was still going on when I joined the men outside.

"Be off with you on your business, you cowardly hound!" I heard Silas say. "Be off with you to the town! and take care you don't meet Ambrose on the way!"

"Take *you* care you don't feel my knife again before I go!" cried the other man.

Silas made a desperate effort to break away from the labourers who were holding him.

"Last time you only felt my fist!" he shouted. "Next time you shall feel *this*!"

He lifted the stick as he spoke. I stepped up, and snatched it out of his hand.

"Mr. Silas," I said, "I am an invalid, and I am

going out for a walk. Your stick will be useful to me. I beg leave to borrow it."

The labourers burst out laughing. Silas fixed his eyes on me with a stare of angry surprise. John Jago, immediately recovering his self-possession, took off his hat, and made me a deferential bow.

"I had no idea, Mr. Lefrank, that we were disturbing you," he said. "I am very much ashamed of myself, sir. I beg to apologise."

"I accept your apology, Mr. Jago," I answered, "on the understanding that you, as the older man, will set the example of forbearance, if your temper is tried on any future occasion as it has been tried to-day. And I have further to request," I added, addressing myself to Silas, "that you will do me a favour, as your father's guest. The next time your good spirits lead you into making jokes at Mr. Jago's expense, don't carry them quite so far. I am sure you meant no harm, Mr. Silas. Will you gratify me by saying so yourself? I want to see you and Mr. Jago shake hands."

John Jago instantly held out his hand, with an assumption of good feeling which was a little over-acted, to my thinking. Silas Meadowcroft made no advance of the same friendly sort on his side.

"Let him go about his business," said Silas. "I won't waste any more words on him, Mr. Lefrank, to please *you*. But (saving your presence) I'm damned if I take his hand!"

Further persuasion was plainly useless, addressed to such a man as this. Silas gave me no further opportunity of remonstrating with him, even if I had been inclined to do so. He turned about in sulky silence, and, retracing his steps along the path, disappeared round the corner of the house. The labourers withdrew next, in different directions, to begin the day's work. John Jago and I were alone.

I left it to the man of the wild brown eyes to speak first.

"In half an hour's time, sir," he said, "I shall be going on business to Narrabee, our market-town here. Can I take any letters to the post for you? or is there anything else that I can do in the town?"

I thanked him, and declined both proposals. He made me another deferential bow, and withdrew into the house. I mechanically followed the path, in the direction which Silas had taken before me.

Turning the corner of the house, and walking on for a little way, I found myself at the entrance to the stables, and face to face with Silas Meadowcroft once more. He had his elbows on the gate of the yard, swinging it slowly backwards and forwards, and turning and twisting a straw between his teeth. When he saw me approaching him, he advanced a step from the gate, and made an effort to excuse himself, with a very ill grace.

"No offence, mister. Ask me what you will besides, and I'll do it for you. But don't ask me to shake hands with John Jago; I hate him too badly for that. If I touched him with one hand, sir, I tell you this, I should throttle him with the other!"

"That's your feeling towards the man, Mr. Silas, is it?"

"That's my feeling, Mr. Lefrank; and I'm not ashamed of it, either."

"Is there any such place as a church in your neighbourhood, Mr. Silas?"

"Of course there is."

"And do you ever go to it?"

"Of course I do."

"At long intervals, Mr. Silas?"

"Every Sunday, sir, without fail."

Some third person behind me burst out laughing; some third person had been listening to our talk. I turned round, and discovered Ambrose Meadowcroft.

"I understand the drift of your catechism, though my brother doesn't," he said. "Don't be hard on Silas, sir. He isn't the only Christian who leaves his Christianity in the pew when he goes out of church. You will never make us friends with John Jago, try as you may. Why, what have you got there, Mr. Lefrank? May I die if it isn't my stick! I have been looking for it everywhere!"

The thick beechen stick had been feeling un-

comfortably heavy in my invalid hand for some time past. There was no sort of need for my keeping it any longer. John Jago was going away to Narrabee, and Silas Meadowcroft's savage temper was subdued to a sulky repose. I handed the stick back to Ambrose. He laughed as he took it from me.

"You can't think how strange it feels, Mr. Lefrank, to be out without one's stick," he said. "A man gets used to his stick, sir; doesn't he? Are you ready for your breakfast?"

"Not just yet. I thought of taking a little walk first."

"All right, sir. I wish I could go with you; but I have got my work to do this morning, and Silas has his work too. If you go back by the way you came, you will find yourself in the garden. If you want to go further, the wicket-gate at the end will lead you into the lane."

Through sheer thoughtlessness, I did a very foolish thing. I turned back as I was told, and left the brothers together at the gate of the stable-yard.

CHAPTER V.

THE NEWS FROM NARRABEE.

ARRIVED at the garden, a thought struck me. The cheerful speech and easy manner of Ambrose plainly indicated that he was ignorant thus far

of the quarrel which had taken place under my window. Silas might confess to having taken his brother's stick, and might mention whose head he had threatened with it. It was not only useless, but undesirable, that Ambrose should know of the quarrel. I retraced my steps to the stable-yard. Nobody was at the gate. I called alternately to Silas and to Ambrose. Nobody answered. The brothers had gone away to their work.

Returning to the garden, I heard a pleasant voice wishing me "Good morning." I looked round. Naomi Colebrook was standing at one of the lower windows of the farm. She had her working-apron on, and she was industriously brightening the knives for the breakfast-table, on an old-fashioned board. A sleek black cat balanced himself on her shoulder watching the flashing motion of the knife as she passed it rapidly to and fro on the leather-covered surface of the board.

"Come here," she said: "I want to speak to you."

I noticed, as I approached, that her pretty face was cloudy and anxious. She pushed the cat irritably off her shoulder: she welcomed me with only the faint reflection of her bright customary smile.

"I have seen John Jago," she said. "He has been hinting at something which he says happened under your bedroom-window this morning. When I begged him to explain himself he only answered, 'Ask Mr. Lefrank; I must be off to Narrabee.'"

What does it mean? Tell me right away, sir! I'm out of temper, and I can't wait!"

Except that I made the best instead of the worst of it, I told her what had happened under my window as plainly as I have told it here. She put down the knife that she was cleaning, and folded her hands before her, thinking.

"I wish I had never given John Jago that meeting," she said. "When a man asks anything of a woman, the woman, I find, mostly repents it if she says 'Yes.'"

She made that quaint reflection with a very troubled brow. The moonlight-meeting had left some unwelcome remembrances in her mind. I saw that as plainly as I saw Naomi herself.

What had John Jago said to her? I put the question with all needful delicacy, making my apologies beforehand.

"I should like to tell *you*," she began, with a strong emphasis on the last word.

There she stopped. She turned pale; then suddenly flushed again to the deepest red. She took up the knife once more, and went on cleaning it as industriously as ever.

"I mustn't tell you," she resumed, with her head down over the knife. "I have promised not to tell anybody. That's the truth. Forget all about it, sir, as soon as you can. Hush! here's the spy who saw us last night on the walk, and who told Silas!"

Dreary Miss Meadowcroft opened the kitchen-

door. She carried an ostentatiously large Prayer Book ; and she looked at Naomi as only a jealous woman of middle age *can* look at a younger and prettier woman than herself.

"Prayers, Miss Colebrook," she said, in her sourest manner. She paused, and noticed me standing under the window. "Prayers, Mr. Lefrank," she added, with a look of devout pity, directed exclusively to my address.

"We will follow you directly, Miss Meadowcroft," said Naomi.

"I have no desire to intrude on your secrets, Miss Colebrook."

With that acrid answer, our priestess took herself and her Prayer Book out of the kitchen. I joined Naomi, entering the room by the garden-door. She met me eagerly.

"I am not quite easy about something," she said. "Did you tell me that you left Ambrose and Silas together?"

"Yes."

"Suppose Silas tells Ambrose of what happened this morning?"

The same idea, as I have already mentioned, had occurred to my mind. I did my best to reassure Naomi.

"Mr. Jago is out of the way," I replied. "You and I can easily put things right in his absence."

She took my arm.

"Come in to prayers," she said. "Ambrose will

be there, and I shall find an opportunity of speaking to him."

Neither Ambrose nor Silas was in the breakfast-room when we entered it. After waiting vainly for ten minutes, Mr. Meadowcroft told his daughter to read the prayers. Miss Meadowcroft read, thereupon, in the tone of an injured woman taking the throne of mercy by storm, and insisting on her rights. Breakfast followed; and still the brothers were absent. Miss Meadowcroft looked at her father, and said, "From bad to worse, sir. What did I tell you?" Naomi instantly applied the antidote: "The boys are no doubt detained over their work, uncle." She turned to me. "You want to see the farm, Mr. Lefrank. Come and help me to find the boys."

For more than an hour we visited one part of the farm after another, without discovering the missing men. We found them at last near the outskirts of a small wood, sitting, talking together, on the trunk of a felled tree.

Silas rose as we approached, and walked away without a word of greeting or apology, into the wood. As he got on his feet I noticed that his brother whispered something in his ear; and I heard him answer, "All right!"

"Ambrose, does that mean you have something to keep a secret from us?" asked Naomi, approaching her lover with a smile. "Is Silas ordered to hold his tongue?"

Ambrose kicked sulkily at the loose stones lying about him. I noticed, with a certain surprise, that his favourite stick was not in his hand, and was not lying near him.

"Business," he said, in answer to Naomi, not very graciously—"business between Silas and me. That's what it means, if you must know."

Naomi went on, woman-like, with her questions, heedless of the reception which they might meet with from an irritated man.

"Why were you both away at prayers and breakfast time?" she asked next.

"We had too much to do," Ambrose gruffly replied, "and we were too far from the house."

"Very odd," said Naomi. "This has never happened before, since I have been at the farm."

"Well, live and learn. It has happened now."

The tone in which he spoke would have warned any man to let him alone. But warnings which speak by implication only are thrown away on women. The woman, having still something in her mind to say, said it.

"Have you seen anything of John Jago this morning?"

The smouldering ill-temper of Ambrose burst suddenly—why, it was impossible to guess—into a flame.

"How many more questions am I to answer?" he broke out, violently. "Are you the parson, putting me through my catechism? I have seen

nothing of John Jago, and I have got my work to go on with. Will that do for you?"

He turned with an oath, and followed his brother into the wood. Naomi's bright eyes looked up at me, flashing with indignation.

"What does he mean, Mr. Lefrank, by speaking to me in that way? Rude brute! How dare he do it?" She paused: her voice, look, and manner suddenly changed. "This has never happened before, sir. Has anything gone wrong? I declare, I shouldn't know Ambrose again, he is so changed. Say, how does it strike you?"

I still made the best of a bad case.

"Something has upset his temper," I said. "The merest trifle, Miss Colebrook, upsets a man's temper sometimes. I speak as a man, and I know it. Give him time, and he will make his excuses, and all will be well again."

My presentation of the case entirely failed to reassure my pretty companion. We went back to the house. Dinner-time came, and the brothers appeared. Their father spoke to them of their absence from morning prayers—with needless severity, as I thought. They resented the reproof with needless indignation on their side, and left the room. A sour smile of satisfaction showed itself on Miss Meadowcroft's thin lips. She looked at her father; then raised her eyes sadly to the ceiling, and said, "We can only pray for them, sir."

Naomi disappeared after dinner. When I saw her again, she had some news for me.

"I have been with Ambrose," she said, "and he has begged my pardon. We have made it up, Mr. Lefrank. Still—still—"

"Still—*what*, Miss Naomi?"

"He is not like himself, sir. He denies it; but I can't help thinking he is hiding something from me."

The day wore on: the evening came. I returned to my French novel. But not even Dumas himself could keep my attention to the story. What else I was thinking of I cannot say. Why I was out of spirits I am unable to explain. I wished myself back in England: I took a blind unreasoning hatred to Morwick Farm.

Nine o'clock struck; and we all assembled again at supper, with the exception of John Jago. He was expected back to supper; and we waited for him a quarter of an hour, by Mr. Meadowcroft's own directions. John Jago never appeared.

The night wore on, and still the absent man failed to return. Miss Meadowcroft volunteered to sit up for him. Naomi eyed her, a little maliciously I must own, as the two women parted for the night. I withdrew to my room; and again I was unable to sleep. When sunrise came, I went out, as before, to breathe the morning air.

On the staircase I met Miss Meadowcroft ascending to her own room. Not a curl of her stiff grey hair was disarranged: nothing about the impenetrable woman betrayed that she had been watching through the night.

"Has Mr. Jago not returned?" I asked.

Miss Meadowcroft slowly shook her head, and frowned at me.

"We are in the hands of Providence, Mr. Le-frank. Mr. Jago must have been detained for the night at Narrabee."

The daily routine of the meals resumed its unalterable course. Breakfast-time came and dinner-time came, and no John Jago darkened the doors of Morwick Farm. Mr. Meadowcroft and his daughter consulted together, and determined to send in search of the missing man. One of the more intelligent of the labourers was despatched to Narrabee to make enquiries.

The man returned late in the evening, bringing startling news to the farm. He had visited all the inns and all the places of business resort in Narrabee; he had made endless enquiries in every direction, with this result—no one had set eyes on John Jago. Everybody declared that John Jago had not entered the town.

We all looked at each other, excepting the two brothers, who were seated together in a dark corner of the room. The conclusion appeared to be inevitable. John Jago was a lost man.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LIME-KILN.

MR. MEADOWCROFT was the first to speak.

"Somebody must find John," he said.

"Without losing a moment," added his daughter.

Ambrose suddenly stepped out of the dark corner of the room.

"I will enquire," he said.

Silas followed him.

"I will go with you," he added.

Mr. Meadowcroft interposed his authority.

"One of you will be enough ; for the present, at least. Go you, Ambrose. Your brother may be wanted later. If any accident has happened (which God forbid), we may have to enquire in more than one direction. Silas, you will stay at the farm."

The brothers withdrew together—Ambrose to prepare for his journey, Silas to saddle one of the horses for him. Naomi slipped out after them. Left in company with Mr. Meadowcroft and his daughter (both devoured by anxiety about the missing man, and both trying to conceal it under an assumption of devout resignation to circumstances), I need hardly add that I too, retired, as soon as it was politely possible for me to leave the room. Ascending the stairs on my way to my own quarters, I discovered Naomi half hidden in a

recess formed by an old-fashioned window-seat on the first landing. My bright little friend was in sore trouble. Her apron was over her face, and she was crying bitterly. Ambrose had not taken his leave as tenderly as usual. She was more firmly persuaded than ever that "Ambrose was hiding something from her." We all waited anxiously for the next day. The next day made the mystery deeper than ever.

The horse which had taken Ambrose to Narrabee was ridden back to the farm by a groom from the hotel. He delivered a written message from Ambrose which startled us. Further enquiries had positively proved that the missing man had never been near Narrabee. The only attainable tidings of his whereabouts were tidings derived from vague report. It was said that a man like John Jago had been seen the previous day in a railway car, travelling on the line to New York. Acting on this imperfect information, Ambrose had decided on verifying the truth of the report by extending his enquiries to New York.

This extraordinary proceeding forced the suspicion on me that something had really gone wrong. I kept my doubts to myself; but I was prepared, from that moment, to see the disappearance of John Jago followed by very grave results.

The same day the results declared themselves.

Time enough had now elapsed for report to spread through the district the news of what had

happened at the farm. Already aware of the bad feeling existing between the men, the neighbours had been now informed (no doubt by the labourers present) of the deplorable scene that had taken place under my bedroom-window. Public opinion declares itself in America without the slightest reserve, or the slightest care for consequences. Public opinion declared on this occasion that the lost man was the victim of foul play, and held one or both of the brothers Meadowcroft responsible for his disappearance. Later in the day, the reasonableness of this serious view of the case was confirmed in the popular mind by a startling discovery. It was announced that a Methodist preacher lately settled at Morwick, and greatly respected throughout the district, had dreamed of John Jago in the character of a murdered man, whose bones were hidden at Morwick Farm. Before night the cry was general for a verification of the preacher's dream. Not only in the immediate district, but in the town of Narrabee itself, the public voice insisted on the necessity of a search for the mortal remains of John Jago at Morwick Farm.

In the terrible turn which matters had now taken, Mr. Meadowcroft the elder displayed a spirit and an energy for which I was not prepared.

"My sons have their faults," he said—"serious faults, and nobody knows it better than I do. My sons have behaved badly and ungratefully towards John Jago; I don't deny that either. But Am-

brose and Silas are not murderers. Make your search. I ask for it; no, I insist on it, after what has been said, in justice to my family and my name!"

The neighbours took him at his word. The Morwick section of the American nation organised itself on the spot. The sovereign people met in committee, made speeches, elected competent persons to represent the public interests, and began the search the next day. The whole proceeding, ridiculously informal from a legal point of view, was carried on by these extraordinary people with as stern and strict a sense of duty as if it had been sanctioned by the highest tribunal in the land.

Naomi met the calamity that had fallen on the household as resolutely as her uncle himself. The girl's courage rose with the call which was made on it. Her one anxiety was for Ambrose.

"He ought to be here," she said to me. "The wretches in this neighbourhood are wicked enough to say that his absence is a confession of his guilt."

She was right. In the present temper of the popular mind the absence of Ambrose was a suspicious circumstance in itself.

"We might telegraph to New York," I suggested, "if you only knew where a message would be likely to find him."

"I know the hotel which the Meadowcrofts use

at New York," she replied. "I was sent there, after my father's death, to wait till Miss Meadowcroft could take me to Morwick."

We decided on telegraphing to the hotel. I was writing the message, and Naomi was looking over my shoulder, when we were startled by a strange voice speaking close behind us.

"Oh! that's his address, is it?" said the voice. "We wanted his address rather badly."

The speaker was a stranger to me. Naomi recognised him as one of the neighbours.

"What do you want his address for?" she asked, sharply.

"I guess we've found the mortal remains of John Jago, miss," the man replied. "We have got Silas already, and we want Ambrose, too, on suspicion of murder."

"It's a lie!" cried Naomi, furiously—"a wicked lie!"

The man turned to me.

"Take her into the next room, mister," he said, "and let her see for herself."

We went together into the next room.

In one corner, sitting by her father, and holding his hand, we saw stern and stony Miss Meadowcroft, weeping silently. Opposite to them, crouched on the window-seat—his eyes wandering, his hands hanging helpless—we next discovered Silas Meadowcroft, plainly self-betrayed as a panic-stricken man. A few of the persons who had been engaged

in the search were seated near, watching him. The mass of the strangers present stood congregated round a table in the middle of the room. They drew aside as I approached with Naomi, and allowed us to have a clear view of certain objects placed on the table.

The centre object of the collection was a little heap of charred bones. Round this were ranged a knife, two metal buttons, and a stick partially burnt. The knife was recognised by the labourers as the weapon John Jago habitually carried about with him—the weapon with which he had wounded Silas Meadowcroft's hand. The buttons Naomi herself declared to have a peculiar pattern on them, which had formerly attracted her attention to John Jago's coat. As for the stick, burnt as it was, I had no difficulty in identifying the quaintly-carved nob at the top. It was the heavy beechen stick which I had snatched out of Silas's hand, and which I had restored to Ambrose on his claiming it as his own. In reply to my enquiries, I was informed that the bones, the knife, the buttons, and the stick, had all been found together in a lime-kiln then in use on the farm.

"Is it serious?" Naomi whispered to me, as we drew back from the table.

It would have been sheer cruelty to deceive her now.

"Yes," I whispered back; "it *is* serious."

The search committee conducted its proceedings

with the strictest regularity. The proper applications were made forthwith to a justice of the peace, and the justice issued his warrant. That night Silas was committed to prison; and an officer was despatched to arrest Ambrose in New York.

For my part, I did the little I could to make myself useful. With the silent sanction of Mr. Meadowcroft and his daughter, I went to Narrabee, and secured the best legal assistance for the defence which the town could place at my disposal. This done, there was no choice but to wait for news of Ambrose, and for the examination before the magistrate which was to follow. I shall pass over the misery in the house during the interval of expectation: no useful purpose could be served by describing it now. Let me only say that Naomi's conduct strengthened me in the conviction that she possessed a noble nature. I was unconscious of the state of my own feelings at the time; but I am now disposed to think that this was the epoch at which I began to envy Ambrose the wife whom he had won.

The telegraph brought us our first news of Ambrose. He had been arrested at the hotel, and he was on his way to Morwick. The next day he arrived, and followed his brother to prison. The two were confined in separate cells, and were forbidden all communication with each other.

Two days later, the preliminary examination took place. Ambrose and Silas Meadowcroft were

charged before the magistrate with the wilful murder of John Jago. I was cited to appear as one of the witnesses; and, at Naomi's own request, I took the poor girl into court, and sat by her during the proceedings. My host also was present in his invalid-chair, with his daughter by his side.

Such was the result of my voyage across the ocean in search of rest and quiet; and thus did time and chance fulfil my first hasty forebodings of the dull life I was to lead at Morwick Farm!

CHAPTER VII.

THE MATERIALS FOR THE DEFENCE.

ON our way to the chairs allotted to us in the magistrate's court, we passed the platform on which the prisoners were standing together.

Silas took no notice of us. Ambrose made a friendly sign of recognition, and then rested his hand on the "bar" in front of him. As she passed beneath him, Naomi was just tall enough to reach his hand on tiptoe. She took it. "I know you are innocent," she whispered, and gave him one look of loving encouragement as she followed me to her place. Ambrose never lost his self-control. I may have been wrong; but I thought this a bad sign.

The case, as stated for the prosecution, told strongly against the suspected men.

Ambrose and Silas Meadowcroft were charged with the murder of John Jago (by means of the stick or by use of some other weapon), and with the deliberate destruction of the body by throwing it into the quick-lime. In proof of this latter assertion, the knife which the deceased habitually carried about him, and the metal buttons which were known to belong to his coat, were produced. It was argued that these indestructible substances, and some fragments of the larger bones, had alone escaped the action of the burning lime. Having produced medical witnesses to support this theory by declaring the bones to be human, and having thus circumstantially asserted the discovery of the remains in the kiln, the prosecution next proceeded to prove that the missing man had been murdered by the two brothers, and had been by them thrown into the quick-lime as a means of concealing their guilt.

Witness after witness deposed to the inveterate enmity against the deceased displayed by Ambrose and Silas. The threatening language they habitually used towards him; their violent quarrels with him, which had become a public scandal throughout the neighbourhood, and which had ended (on one occasion at least) in a blow; the disgraceful scene which had taken place under my window; and the restoration to Ambrose, on the morning of the fatal quarrel, of the very stick which had been found among the remains of the

dead man—these facts and events, and a host of minor circumstances besides, sworn to by witnesses whose credit was unimpeachable, pointed with terrible directness to the conclusion at which the prosecution had arrived.

I looked at the brothers as the weight of the evidence pressed more and more heavily against them. To outward view, at least, Ambrose still maintained his self-possession. It was far otherwise with Silas. Abject terror showed itself in his ghastly face; in his great knotty hands, clinging convulsively to the bar at which he stood; in his staring eyes, fixed in vacant horror on each witness who appeared. Public feeling judged him on the spot. There he stood, self-betrayed already, in the popular opinion, as a guilty man!

The one point gained in cross-examination by the defence related to the charred bones.

Pressed on this point, a majority of the medical witnesses admitted that their examination had been a hurried one, and that it was just possible that the bones might yet prove to be the remains of an animal, and not of a man. The presiding magistrate decided upon this, that a second examination should be made, and that the number of the medical experts should be increased.

Here the preliminary proceedings ended. The prisoners were remanded for three days.

The prostration of Silas at the close of the enquiry was so complete, that it was found necessary

to have two men to support him on his leaving the court. Ambrose leaned over the bar to speak to Naomi before he followed the gaoler out. "Wait," he whispered confidently, "till they hear what I have to say!" Naomi kissed her hand to him affectionately, and turned to me with the bright tears in her eyes.

"Why don't they hear what he has to say at once?" she asked. "Anybody can see that Ambrose is innocent. It's a crying shame, sir, to send him back to prison. Don't you think so yourself?"

If I had confessed what I really thought, I should have said that Ambrose had proved nothing to my mind, except that he possessed rare powers of self-control. It was impossible to acknowledge this to my little friend. I diverted her mind from the question of her lover's innocence, by proposing that we should get the necessary order and visit him in his prison on the next day. Naomi dried her tears, and gave me a little grateful squeeze of the hand.

"Oh, my! what a good fellow you are?" cried the outspoken American girl. "When your time comes to be married, sir, I guess the woman won't repent saying 'Yes' to *you!*"

Mr. Meadowcroft preserved unbroken silence as we walked back to the farm on either side of his invalid-chair. His last reserves of resolution seemed to have given way under the overwhelming strain laid on them by the proceedings in court.

His daughter, in stern indulgence to Naomi, mercifully permitted her opinion to glimmer on us only, through the medium of quotation from Scripture-texts. If the texts meant anything, they meant that she had foreseen all that had happened, and that the one sad aspect of the case, to her mind, was the death of John Jago, unprepared to meet his end.

I obtained the order of admission to the prison the next morning.

We found Ambrose still confident of the favourable result, for his brother and for himself, of the enquiry before the magistrate. He seemed to be almost as eager to tell, as Naomi was to hear, the true story of what had happened at the lime-kiln. The authorities of the prison—present, of course, at the interview—warned him to remember that what he said might be taken down in writing and produced against him in court.

“Take it down, gentlemen, and welcome,” Ambrose replied. “I have nothing to fear; I am only telling the truth.”

With that he turned to Naomi, and began his narrative, as nearly as I can remember, in these words:—

“I may as well make a clean breast of it at starting, my girl. After Mr. Lefrank left us that morning, I asked Silas how he came by my stick. In telling me how, Silas also told me of the words that had passed between him and John Jago under

Mr. Lefrank's window. I was angry and jealous; and I own it freely, Naomi, I thought the worst that could be thought about you and John."

Here Naomi stopped him without ceremony.

"Was that what made you speak to me as you spoke when we found you at the wood?" she asked.

"Yes."

"And was that what made you leave me, when you went away to Narrabee, without giving me a kiss at parting?"

"It was."

"Beg my pardon for it before you say a word more."

"I beg your pardon."

"Say you are ashamed of yourself."

"I am ashamed of myself," Ambrose answered, penitently.

"Now you may go on," said Naomi. "Now I'm satisfied."

Ambrose went on.

"We were on our way to the clearing at the other side of the wood while Silas was talking to me; and, as ill luck would have it, we took the path that led by the lime-kiln. Turning the corner, we met John Jago on his way to Narrabee. I was too angry, I tell you, to let him pass quietly. I gave him a bit of my mind. His blood was up too, I suppose; and he spoke out, on his side, as freely as I did. I own I threatened him with the stick; but I'll swear to it I meant him no harm. You

know—after dressing Silas's hand—that John Jago is ready with his knife. He comes from out West, where they are always ready with one weapon or another handy in their pockets. It's likely enough *he* didn't mean to harm me, either; but how could I be sure of that? When he stepped up to me, and showed his weapon, I dropped the stick, and closed with him. With one hand I wrenched the knife away from him; and with the other I caught him by the collar of his rotten old coat, and gave him a shaking that made his bones rattle in his skin. A big piece of the cloth came away in my hand. I shied it into the quick-lime close by us, and I pitched the knife after the cloth; and, if Silas hadn't stopped me, I think it's likely I might have shied John Jago himself into the lime next. As it was, Silas kept hold of me. Silas shouted out to him, 'Be off with you! and don't come back again, if you don't want to be burnt in the kiln!' He stood looking at us for a minute, fetching his breath, and holding his torn coat round him. Then he spoke with a deadly-quiet voice and a deadly-quiet look: 'Many a true word, Mr. Silas,' he says, 'is spoken in jest. *I shall not come back again.*' He turned about, and left us. We stood staring at each other like a couple of fools. 'You don't think he means it?' I says. 'Bosh!' says Silas. 'He's too sweet on Naomi not to come back.' What's the matter now, Naomi?"

I had noticed it too. She started and turned

pale, when Ambrose repeated to her what Silas had said to him.

"Nothing is the matter," Naomi answered. "Your brother has no right to take liberties with my name. Go on. Did Silas say any more while he was about it?"

"Yes: he looked into the kiln; and he says, 'What made you throw away the knife, Ambrose?'—'How does a man know why he does anything,' I says, 'when he does it in a passion?'—'It's a ripping-good knife,' says Silas: 'in your place, I should have kept it.' I picked up the stick off the ground. 'Who says I've lost it yet?' I answered him; and with that I got up on the side of the kiln, and began sounding for the knife, to bring it, you know, by means of the stick, within easy reach of a shovel, or some such thing. 'Give us your hand,' I says to Silas. 'Let me stretch out a bit, and I'll have it in no time.' Instead of finding the knife, I came nigh to falling myself into the burning lime. The vapour overpowered me, I suppose. All I know is, I turned giddy, and dropped the stick in the kiln. I should have followed the stick, to a dead certainty, but for Silas pulling me back by the hand. 'Let it be,' says Silas. 'If I hadn't had hold of you, John Jago's knife might have been the death of you, after all!' He led me away by the arm, and we went on together on the road to the wood. We stopped where you found us, and sat down on the felled tree. We had a little more talk

about John Jago. It ended in our agreeing to wait and see what happened, and to keep our own counsel in the mean time. You and Mr. Lefrank came upon us, Naomi, while we were still talking; and you guessed right when you guessed that we had a secret from you. You know the secret now."

There he stopped. I put the question to him—the first that I had asked yet.

"Had you or your brother any fear at that time of the charge which has since been brought against you?" I said.

"No such thought entered our heads, sir," Ambrose answered. "How could *we* foresee that the neighbours would search the kiln, and say what they have said of us? All we feared was, that the old man might hear of the quarrel, and be bitterer against us than ever. I was the more anxious of the two to keep things secret, because I had Naomi to consider as well as the old man. Put yourself in my place; and you will own, sir, that the prospect at home was not a pleasant one for *me*, if John Jago really kept away from the farm, and if it came out that it was all my doing."

(This was certainly an explanation of his conduct; but it was not quite satisfactory to my mind.)

"As *you* believe, then," I went on, "John Jago has carried out his threat of not returning to the farm? According to you, he is now alive and in hiding somewhere?"

"Certainly!" said Ambrose.

"Certainly!" repeated Naomi.

"Do you believe the report that he was seen travelling on the railway to New York?"

"I believe it firmly, sir; and, what is more, I believe I was on his track. I was only too anxious to find him; and I say I could have found him, if they would have let me stay in New York."

I looked at Naomi.

"I believe it too," she said. "John Jago is keeping away."

"Do you suppose he is afraid of Ambrose and Silas?"

She hesitated.

"He *may* be afraid of them," she replied, with a strong emphasis on the word "may."

"But you don't think it likely?"

She hesitated again. I pressed her again.

"Do you think there is any other motive for his absence?"

Her eyes dropped to the floor. She answered obstinately, almost doggedly,—

"I can't say."

I addressed myself to Ambrose.

"Have you anything more to tell us?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I have told you all I know about it."

I rose to speak to the lawyer whose services I had retained. He had helped us to get the order

of admission, and he had accompanied us to the prison. Seated apart, he had kept silence throughout, attentively watching the effect of Ambrose Meadowcroft's narrative on the officers of the prison and on me.

"Is this the defence?" I enquired, in a whisper.

"This is the defence, Mr. Lefrank. What do you think, between ourselves?"

"Between ourselves, I think the magistrate will commit them for trial."

"On the charge of murder?"

"Yes; on the charge of murder."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONFESSION.

MY replies to the lawyer accurately expressed the conviction in my mind. The narrative related by Ambrose had all the appearance, in my eyes, of a fabricated story, got up, and clumsily got up, to pervert the plain meaning of the circumstantial evidence produced by the prosecution. I reached this conclusion reluctantly and regretfully, for Naomi's sake. I said all I could say to shake the absolute confidence which she felt in the discharge of the prisoners at the next examination.

The day of the adjourned enquiry arrived.

Naomi and I again attended the court together. Mr. Meadowcroft was unable, on this occasion, to

leave the house. His daughter was present, walking to the court by herself, and occupying a seat by herself.

On his second appearance at the "bar," Silas was more composed, and more like his brother: No new witnesses were called by the prosecution. We began the battle over the medical evidence relating to the charred bones; and, to some extent, we won the victory. In other words we forced the doctors to acknowledge that they differed widely in their opinions. They confessed that they were not certain. Two went still further, and declared that the bones were the bones of an animal, not of a man. We made the most of this; and then we entered upon the defence, founded on Ambrose Meadowcroft's story.

Necessarily, no witnesses could be called on our side. Whether this circumstance discouraged him, or whether he privately shared my opinion of his client's statement, I cannot say—it is only certain that the lawyer spoke mechanically, doing his best, no doubt, but doing it without genuine conviction or earnestness on his own part. Naomi cast an anxious glance at me as he sat down. The girl's hand, when I took it, turned cold in mine. She saw plain signs of the failure of the defence in the look and manner of the counsel for the prosecution; but she waited resolutely until the presiding magistrate announced his decision. I had only too clearly foreseen what he would feel it to be his

duty to do. Naomi's head dropped on my shoulder as he said the terrible words which committed Ambrose and Silas Meadowcroft to take their trial on the charge of murder.

I led her out of the court into the air. As I passed the "bar," I saw Ambrose, deadly pale, looking after us as we left him; the magistrate's decision had evidently daunted him. His brother Silas had dropped in abject terror on the gaoler's chair; the miserable wretch shook and shuddered dumbly like a cowed dog.

Miss Meadowcroft returned with us to the farm, preserving unbroken silence on the way back. I could detect nothing in her bearing which suggested any compassionate feeling for the prisoners in her stern and secret nature. On Naomi's withdrawal to her own room, we were left together for a few minutes; and then, to my astonishment, the outwardly merciless woman showed me that she, too, was one of Eve's daughters, and could feel and suffer, in her own hard way, like the rest of us. She suddenly stepped close up to me, and laid her hand on my arm.

"You are a lawyer, ain't you?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Have you had any experience in your profession?"

"Ten years' experience."

"Do *you* think——" She stopped abruptly; her hard face softened; her eyes dropped to the

ground. "Never mind," she said, confusedly. "I'm upset by all this misery, though I may not look like it. Don't notice me."

She turned away. I waited, in the firm persuasion that the unspoken question in her mind would sooner or later force its way to utterance by her lips. I was right. She came back to me unwillingly, like a woman acting under some influence which the utmost exertion of her will was powerless to resist.

"Do *you* believe John Jago is still a living man?"

She put the question vehemently, desperately, as if the words rushed out of her mouth in spite of her.

"I do *not* believe it," I answered.

"Remember what John Jago has suffered at the hands of my brothers," she persisted. "Is it not in your experience that he should take a sudden resolution to leave the farm?"

I replied, as plainly as before,—

"It is *not* in my experience."

She stood looking at me for a moment with a face of blank despair; then bowed her grey head in silence, and left me. As she crossed the room to the door, I saw her look upward; and I heard her say to herself softly, between her teeth, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord."

It was the requiem of John Jago, pronounced by the woman who loved him.

When I next saw her, her mask was on once more. Miss Meadowcroft was herself again. Miss Meadowcroft could sit by, impenetrably calm, while the lawyers discussed the terrible position of her brothers, with the scaffold in view as one of the possibilities of the "case."

Left by myself, I began to feel uneasy about Naomi. I went upstairs, and, knocking softly at her door, made my enquiries from outside. The clear young voice answered me sadly, "I am trying to bear it: I won't distress you when we meet again." I descended the stairs, feeling my first suspicion of the true nature of my interest in the American girl. Why had her answer brought the tears into my eyes? I went out walking, alone, to think undisturbedly. Why did the tones of her voice dwell on my ear all the way? Why did my hand still feel the last cold faint pressure of her fingers when I led her out of court?

I took a sudden resolution to go back to England.

When I returned to the farm, it was evening. The lamp was not yet lit in the hall. Pausing to accustom my eyes to the obscurity in-doors, I heard the voice of the lawyer whom we had employed for the defence, speaking to some one very earnestly.

"I'm not to blame," said the voice. "She snatched the paper out of my hand before I was aware of her."

"Do you want it back?" asked the voice of Miss Meadowcroft.

"No: it's only a copy. If keeping it will help to quiet her, let her keep it by all means. Good evening."

Saying those last words, the lawyer approached me on his way out of the house. I stopped him without ceremony: I felt an ungovernable curiosity to know more.

"Who snatched the paper out of your hand?" I asked, bluntly.

The lawyer started. I had taken him by surprise. The instinct of professional reticence made him pause before he answered me.

In the brief interval of silence, Miss Meadowcroft replied to my question from the other end of the hall.

"Naomi Colebrook snatched the paper out of his hand."

"What paper?"

A door opened softly behind me. Naomi herself appeared on the threshold; Naomi herself answered my question.

"I will tell you," she whispered. "Come in here."

One candle only was burning in the room. I looked at her by the dim light. My resolution to return to England instantly became one of the lost ideas of my life.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, "what has happened now?"

She gave me the paper which she had taken from the lawyer's hand.

The "copy" to which he had referred was a copy of the written confession of Silas Meadowcroft on his return to prison. He accused his brother Ambrose of the murder of John Jago. He declared on his oath that he had seen his brother Ambrose commit the crime.

In the popular phrase, I could "hardly believe my own eyes." I read the last sentences of the confession for the second time:—

" . . . I heard their voices at the lime-kiln. They were having words about Cousin Naomi. I ran to the place to part them. I was not in time. I saw Ambrose strike the deceased a terrible blow on the head with his (Ambrose's) heavy stick. The deceased dropped without a cry. I put my hand on his heart. He was dead. I was horribly frightened. Ambrose threatened to kill *me* next if I said a word to any living soul. He took up the body and cast it into the quick-lime, and threw the stick in after it. We went on together to the wood. We sat down on a felled tree outside the wood. Ambrose made up the story that we were to tell if what he had done was found out. He made me repeat it after him like a lesson. We were still at it when Cousin Naomi and Mr. Lefrank came up to us. They know the rest. This, on my oath, is a true confession. I make it of my

own free will, repenting me sincerely that I did not make it before.

(Signed) "SILAS MEADOWCROFT."

I laid down the paper, and looked at Naomi once more. She spoke to me with a strange composure. Immovable determination was in her eye; immovable determination was in her voice.

"Silas has lied away his brother's life to save himself," she said. "I see cowardly falsehood and cowardly cruelty in every line on that paper. Ambrose is innocent, and the time has come to prove it."

"You forget," I said, "that we have just failed to prove it."

She took no notice of my objection.

"John Jago is alive, in hiding from us," she went on. "Help me, friend Lefrank, to advertise for him in the newspapers."

I drew back from her in speechless distress. I own I believed that the new misery which had fallen on her had affected her brain.

"You don't believe it?" she said. "Shut the door."

I obeyed her. She seated herself, and pointed to a chair near her.

"Sit down," she proceeded. "I am going to do a wrong thing, but there is no help for it. I am going to break a sacred promise. You remember that moonlight night when I met him on the garden-walk?"

"John Jago?"

"Yes. Now listen. I am going to tell you what passed between John Jago and me."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ADVERTISEMENT.

I WAITED in silence for the disclosure that was now to come. Naomi began by asking me a question.

"You remember when we went to see Ambrose in prison?" she said.

"Perfectly."

"Ambrose told us of something which his villain of a brother said of John Jago and me. Do you remember what it was?"

I remember perfectly. Silas had said, "John Jago is too sweet on Naomi not to come back."

"That's so," Naomi remarked, when I had repeated the words. "I couldn't help starting when I heard what Silas had said; and I thought you noticed me."

"I did notice you."

"Did you wonder what it meant?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell you. It meant this: What Silas Meadowcroft said to his brother of John Jago, was what I myself was thinking of John Jago at that very moment. It startled me to find my own thought in a man's mind, spoken for me by a man. I am the person, sir, who has driven John Jago away from Morwick Farm; and I am the person who can and will bring him back again."

There was something in her manner, more than in her words, which let the light in suddenly on my mind.

"You have told me the secret," I said. "John Jago is in love with you."

"Mad about me!" she rejoined, dropping her voice to a whisper. "Stark, staring mad!—that's the only word for him. After we had taken a few turns on the gravel-walk, he suddenly broke out like a man beside himself. He fell down on his knees; he kissed my gown, he kissed my feet; he sobbed and cried for love of me. I'm not badly off for courage, sir, considering I'm a woman. No man, that I can call to mind, ever really scared me before. But, I own, John Jago frightened me: oh, my! he did frighten me! My heart was in my mouth, and my knees shook under me. I begged and prayed of him to get up and go away. No; there he knelt, and held by the skirt of my gown. The words poured out from him like—well, like nothing I can think of but water from a pump. His happiness and his life, and his hopes in earth and heaven, and Lord only knows what besides, all depended, he said, on a word from me. I plucked up spirit enough at that to remind him that I was promised to Ambrose. 'I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself,' I said, 'to own that you are wicked enough to love me when you know I am promised to another man!' When I spoke to him, he took a new turn; he began abusing Ambrose.

That straightened me up. I snatched my gown out of his hand, and I gave him my whole mind. 'I hate you!' I said. 'Even if I wasn't promised to Ambrose, I wouldn't marry you; no! not if there wasn't another man left in the world to ask me. I hate you, Mr. Jago! I hate you!' He saw I was in earnest at last. He got up from my feet, and he settled down quiet again, all on a sudden. 'You have said enough' (that was how he answered me). 'You have broken my life. I have no hopes and no prospects now. I had a pride in the farm, miss, and a pride in my work; I bore with your brutish cousins' hatred of me; I was faithful to Mr. Meadowcroft's interests; all for your sake, Naomi Colebrook—all for your sake! I have done with it now; I have done with my life at the farm. You will never be troubled with me again. I am going away, as the dumb creatures go when they are sick, to hide myself in a corner, and die. Do me one last favour. Don't make me the laughing-stock of the whole neighbourhood. I can't bear that: it maddens me, only to think of it. Give me your promise never to tell any living soul what I have said to you to-night—your sacred promise to the man whose life you have broken!' I did as he bade me: I gave him my sacred promise with the tears in my eyes. Yes; that is so. After telling him I hated him (and I did hate him), I cried over his misery; I did. Mercy, what fools women are! What is the horrid perversity, sir, which

makes us always ready to pity the men? He held out his hand to me; and he said, 'Good-bye for ever!' and I pitied him. I said, 'I'll shake hands with you if you will give me your promise in exchange for mine. I beg of you not to leave the farm. What will my uncle do if you go away? Stay here and be friends with me; and forget and forgive, Mr. John.' He gave me his promise (he can refuse me nothing); and he gave it again when I saw him again the next morning. Yes, I'll do him justice, though I do hate him! I believe he honestly meant to keep his word as long as my eye was on him. It was only when he was left to himself that the Devil tempted him to break his promise, and leave the farm. I was brought up to believe in the Devil, Mr. Lefrank; and I find it explains many things. It explains John Jago. Only let me find out where he has gone, and I'll engage he shall come back and clear Ambrose of the suspicion which his vile brother has cast on him. Here is the pen already for you. Advertise for him, friend Lefrank; and do it right away, for my sake!"

I let her run on, without attempting to dispute her conclusions, until she could say no more. When she put the pen into my hand, I began the composition of the advertisement, as obediently as if I, too, believed that John Jago was a living man.

In the case of anyone else, I should have openly

acknowledged that my own convictions remained unshaken. If no quarrel had taken place at the lime-kiln, I should have been quite ready, as I viewed the case, to believe that John Jago's disappearance was referable to the terrible disappointment which Naomi had inflicted on him. The same morbid dread of ridicule which had led him to assert that he cared nothing for Naomi, when he and Silas had quarrelled under my bedroom-window, might also have impelled him to withdraw himself secretly and suddenly from the scene of his discomfiture. But to ask me to believe, after what had happened at the lime-kiln, that he was still living, was to ask me to take Ambrose Meadowcroft's statement for granted as a true statement of facts.

I had refused to do this from the first; and I still persisted in taking that course. If I had been called upon to decide the balance of probability between the narrative related by Ambrose in his defence and the narrative related by Silas in his confession, I must have owned, no matter how unwillingly, that the confession was, to my mind, the least incredible story of the two.

Could I say this to Naomi? I would have written fifty advertisements enquiring for John Jago rather than say it; and you would have done the same, if you had been so fond of her as I was.

I drew out the advertisement, for insertion in "The Morwick Mercury," in these terms:—

MURDER.— Printers of newspapers throughout the United States are desired to publish that Ambrose Meadowcroft and Silas Meadowcroft, of Morwick Farm, Morwick County, are committed for trial on the charge of murdering John Jago, now missing from the farm and from the neighbourhood. Any person who can give information of the existence of said Jago may save the lives of two wrongly accused men by making immediate communication. Jago is about five feet four inches high. He is spare and wiry ; his complexion is extremely pale ; his eyes are dark, and very bright and restless. The lower part of his face is concealed by a thick black beard and moustache. The whole appearance of the man is wild and flighty.

I added the date and address. That evening a servant was sent on horseback to Narrabee to procure the insertion of the advertisement in the next issue of the newspaper.

When we parted that night, Naomi looked almost like her brighter and happier self. Now that the advertisement was on its way to the printing-office, she was more than sanguine : she was certain of the result.

“ You don't know how you have comforted me,” she said, in her frank, warm-hearted way, when we parted for the night. “ All the newspapers will copy it, and we shall hear of John Jago before the week is out.” She turned to go, and came back again to me. “ I will never forgive Silas for writing that confession !” she whispered in my ear. “ If he ever lives under the same roof with Ambrose again, I—well, I believe I wouldn't marry Ambrose if he did ! There !”

She left me. Through the wakeful hours of the night my mind dwelt on her last words. That she should contemplate, under any circumstances, even the bare possibility of not marrying Ambrose, was, I am ashamed to say, a direct encouragement to certain hopes which I had already begun to form in secret. The next day's mail brought me a letter on business. My clerk wrote to enquire if there was any chance of my returning to England in time to appear in court at the opening of next law term. I answered, without hesitation, "It is still impossible for me to fix the date of my return." Naomi was in the room while I was writing. How would she have answered, I wonder, if I had told her the truth, and said, "You are responsible for this letter?"

CHAPTER X.

THE SHERIFF AND THE GOVERNOR.

THE question of time was now a serious question at Morwick Farm. In six weeks, the court for the trial of criminal cases was to be opened at Narrabee.

During this interval, no new event of any importance occurred.

Many idle letters reached us relating to the advertisement for John Jago; but no positive information was received. Not the slightest trace

of the lost man turned up ; not the shadow of a doubt was cast on the assertion of the prosecution, that his body had been destroyed in the kiln. Silas Meadowcroft held firmly to the horrible confession that he had made. His brother Ambrose, with equal resolution, asserted his innocence, and reiterated the statement which he had already advanced. At regular periods I accompanied Naomi to visit him in the prison. As the day appointed for the opening of the court approached, he seemed to falter a little in his resolution ; his manner became restless ; and he grew irritably suspicious about the merest trifles. This change did not necessarily imply the consciousness of guilt : it might merely have indicated natural nervous agitation as the time for the trial drew near. Naomi noticed the alteration in her lover. It greatly increased her anxiety, though it never shook her confidence in Ambrose. Except at meal-times, I was left, during the period of which I am now writing, almost constantly alone with the charming American girl. Miss Meadowcroft searched the newspapers for tidings of the living John Jago in the privacy of her own room. Mr. Meadowcroft would see nobody but his daughter and his doctor, and occasionally one or two old friends. I have since had reason to believe that Naomi, in these days of our intimate association, discovered the true nature of the feeling with which she had inspired me. But she kept her

secret. Her manner towards me steadily remained the manner of a sister: she never overstepped by a hair's breadth the safe limits of the character she had assumed.

The sittings of the court began. After hearing the evidence, and examining the confession of Silas Meadowcroft, the grand jury found a true bill against both the prisoners. The day appointed for the trial was the first day in the new week.

I had carefully prepared Naomi's mind for the decision of the grand jury. She bore the new blow bravely.

"If you are not tired of it," she said, "come with me to the prison to-morrow. Ambrose will need a little comfort by that time." She paused, and looked at the day's letters lying on the table. "Still not a word about John Jago," she said. "And all the papers have copied the advertisement. I felt so sure we should hear of him long before this!"

"Do you still feel sure that he is living?" I ventured to ask.

"I am as certain of it as ever," she replied firmly. "He is somewhere in hiding: perhaps he is in disguise. Suppose we know no more of him than we know now, when the trial begins? Suppose the jury——" She stopped, shuddering. Death—shameful death on the scaffold—might be the terrible result of the consultation of the jury. "We have waited for news to come to us long

enough," Naomi resumed. "We must find the tracks of John Jago for ourselves. There is a week yet before the trial begins. Who will help me to make enquiries? Will you be the man, friend Lefrank?"

It is needless to add (though I knew nothing would come of it) that I consented to be the man.

We arranged to apply that day for the order of admission to the prison, and, having seen Ambrose, to devote ourselves immediately to the contemplated search. How that search was to be conducted was more than I could tell, and more than Naomi could tell. We were to begin by applying to the police to help us to find John Jago, and we were then to be guided by circumstances. Was there ever a more hopeless programme than this?

"Circumstances" declared themselves against us at starting. I applied, as usual, for the order of admission to the prison, and the order was for the first time refused; no reason being assigned by the persons in authority for taking this course. Enquire as I might, the only answer given was, "Not to-day."

At Naomi's suggestion, we went to the prison to seek the explanation which was refused to us at the office. The gaoler on duty at the outer gate was one of Naomi's many admirers. He solved the mystery cautiously in a whisper. The sheriff and the governor of the prison were then speaking privately with Ambrose Meadowcroft in

his cell : they had expressly directed that no persons should be admitted to see the prisoner that day but themselves.

What did it mean ? We returned, wondering, to the farm. There Naomi, speaking by chance to one of the female servants, made certain discoveries.

Early that morning the sheriff had been brought to Morwick by an old friend of the Meadowcrofts. A long interview had been held between Mr. Meadowcroft and his daughter and the official personage introduced by the friend. Leaving the farm, the sheriff had gone straight to the prison, and had proceeded with the governor to visit Ambrose in his cell. Was some potent influence being brought privately to bear on Ambrose ? Appearances certainly suggested that enquiry. Supposing the influence to have been really exerted, the next question followed, What was the object in view ? We could only wait and see.

Our patience was not severely tried. The event of the next day enlightened us in a very unexpected manner. Before noon, the neighbours brought startling news from the prison to the farm.

Ambrose Meadowcroft had confessed himself to be the murderer of John Jago ! He had signed the confession in the presence of the sheriff and the governor on that very day !

I saw the document. It is needless to repro-

duce it here. In substance, Ambrose confessed what Silas had confessed; claiming, however, to have only struck Jago under intolerable provocation, so as to reduce the nature of his offence against the law from murder to manslaughter. Was the confession really the true statement of what had taken place? or had the sheriff and the governor, acting in the interests of the family name, persuaded Ambrose to try this desperate means of escaping the ignominy of death on the scaffold? The sheriff and the governor preserved impenetrable silence until the pressure put on them judicially at the trial obliged them to speak.

Who was to tell Naomi of this last and saddest of all the calamities which had fallen on her? Knowing how I loved her in secret, I felt an invincible reluctance to be the person who revealed Ambrose Meadowcroft's degradation to his betrothed wife. Had any other member of the family told her what had happened? The lawyer was able to answer me: Miss Meadowcroft had told her.

I was shocked when I heard it. Miss Meadowcroft was the last person in the house to spare the poor girl: Miss Meadowcroft would make the hard tidings doubly terrible to bear in the telling. I tried to find Naomi, without success. She had been always accessible at other times. Was she hiding herself from me now? The idea occurred to me as I was descending the stairs after vainly

knocking at the door of her room. I was determined to see her. I waited a few minutes, and then ascended the stairs again suddenly. On the landing I met her, just leaving her room.

She tried to run back. I caught her by the arm, and detained her. With her free hand she held her handkerchief over her face so as to hide it from me.

"You once told me I had comforted you," I said to her, gently. "Won't you let me comfort you now?"

She still struggled to get away, and still kept her head turned from me.

"Don't you see that I am ashamed to look you in the face?" she said, in low broken tones. "Let me go."

I still persisted in trying to soothe her. I drew her to the window-seat. I said I would wait until she was able to speak to me.

She dropped on the seat, and wrung her hands on her lap. Her downcast eyes still obstinately avoided meeting mine.

"Oh!" she said to herself, "what madness possessed me? Is it possible that I ever disgraced myself by loving Ambrose Meadowcroft?" She shuddered as the idea found its way to expression on her lips. The tears rolled slowly over her cheeks. "Don't despise me, Mr. Lefrank!" she said, faintly.

I tried, honestly tried, to put the confession before her in its least unfavourable light.

"His resolution has given way," I said. "He has done this, despairing of proving his innocence, in terror of the scaffold."

She rose, with an angry stamp of her foot. She turned her face on me with the deep-red flush of shame in it, and the big tears glistening in her eyes.

"No more of him!" she said, sternly. "If he is not a murderer, what else is he? A liar and a coward! In which of his characters does he disgrace me most? I have done with him for ever! I will never speak to him again!" She pushed me furiously away from her; advanced a few steps towards her own door; stopped, and came back to me. The generous nature of the girl spoke in her next words. "I am not ungrateful to *you*, friend Lefrank. A woman in my place is only a woman; and, when she is shamed as I am, she feels it very bitterly. Give me your hand! God bless you!"

She put my hand to her lips before I was aware of her, and kissed it, and ran back into her room.

I sat down on the place which she had occupied. She had looked at me for one moment when she kissed my hand. I forgot Ambrose and his confession; I forgot the coming trial; I forgot my professional duties and my English friends. There I sat, in a fool's elysium of my own making, with absolutely nothing in my mind but the picture of Naomi's face at the moment when she had last looked at me!

I have already mentioned that I was in love with her. I merely add this to satisfy you that I tell the truth.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PEBBLE AND THE WINDOW.

MISS MEADOWCROFT and I were the only representatives of the family at the farm who attended the trial. We went separately to Narrabee. Excepting the ordinary greetings at morning and night, Miss Meadowcroft had not said one word to me since the time when I told her that I did *no* believe John Jago to be a living man.

I have purposely abstained from encumbering my narrative with legal details. I now propose to state the nature of the defence in the briefest outline only.

We insisted on making both the prisoners plead "Not guilty." This done, we took an objection to the legality of the proceedings at starting. We appealed to the old English law, that there should be no conviction for murder until the body of the murdered person was found, or proof of its destruction obtained beyond a doubt. We denied that sufficient proof had been obtained in the case now before the court.

The judges consulted, and decided that the trial should go on. We took our next objection when the Confessions were produced in evidence. We

declared that they had been extorted by terror, or by undue influence; and we pointed out certain minor particulars in which the two confessions failed to corroborate each other. For the rest, our defence on this occasion was, as to essentials, what our defence had been at the enquiry before the magistrate. Once more the judges consulted, and once more they overruled our objection. The Confessions were admitted in evidence.

On their side, the prosecution produced one new witness in support of their case. It is needless to waste time in recapitulating his evidence. He contradicted himself gravely on cross-examination. We showed plainly, and after investigation proved, that he was not to be believed on his oath.

The Chief Justice summed up.

He charged, in relation to the Confessions, that no weight should be attached to confession incited by hope or fear; and he left it to the jury to determine whether the Confessions in this case had been so influenced. In the course of the trial, it had been shown for the defence that the sheriff and the governor of the prison had told Ambrose, with his father's knowledge and sanction, that the case was clearly against him; that the only chance of sparing his family the disgrace of his death by public execution lay in making a confession; and that they would do their best, if he did confess, to have his sentence commuted to transportation for life. As for Silas, he was proved to have been

beside himself with terror when he made his abominable charge against his brother. We had vainly trusted to the evidence on these two points to induce the court to reject the Confessions; and we were destined to be once more disappointed in anticipating that the same evidence would influence the verdict of the jury on the side of mercy. After an absence of an hour, they returned into court with a verdict of "Guilty" against both the prisoners.

Being asked in due form if they had anything to say in mitigation of their sentence, Ambrose and Silas solemnly declared their innocence, and publicly acknowledged that their respective confessions had been wrung from them with the hope of escaping the hangman's hands. This statement was not noticed by the bench. The prisoners were both sentenced to death.

On my return to the farm, I did not see Naomi. Miss Meadowcroft informed her of the result of the trial. Half an hour later, one of the women-servants handed to me an envelope bearing my name on it in Naomi's handwriting.

The envelope enclosed a letter, and with it a slip of paper on which Naomi had hurriedly written these words: "For God's sake, read the letter I send to you, and do something about it immediately!"

I looked at the letter. It assumed to be written by a gentleman in New York. Only the day be-

fore, he had, by the merest accident, seen the advertisement for John Jago, cut out of a newspaper and pasted into a book of "curiosities" kept by a friend. Upon this he wrote to Morwick Farm to say that he had seen a man exactly answering to the description of John Jago, but bearing another name, working as a clerk in a merchant's office in Jersey City. Having time to spare before the mail went out, he had returned to the office to take another look at the man before he posted his letter. To his surprise, he was informed that the clerk had not appeared at his desk that day. His employer had sent to his lodgings, and had been informed that he had suddenly packed up his hand-bag after reading the newspaper at breakfast; had paid his rent honestly, and had gone away, nobody knew where!

It was late in the evening when I read these lines. I had time for reflection before it would be necessary for me to act.

Assuming the letter to be genuine, and adopting Naomi's explanation of the motive which had led John Jago to absent himself secretly from the farm, I reached the conclusion that the search for him might be usefully limited to Narrabee and to the surrounding neighbourhood.

The newspaper at his breakfast had no doubt given him his first information of the "finding" of the grand jury, and of the trial to follow. It was in my experience of human nature that he should

venture back to Narrabee under these circumstances, and under the influence of his infatuation for Naomi. More than this, it was again in my experience, I am sorry to say, that he should attempt to make the critical position of Ambrose a means of extorting Naomi's consent to listen favourably to his suit. Cruel indifference to the injury and the suffering which his sudden absence might inflict on others, was plainly implied in his secret withdrawal from the farm. The same cruel indifference, pushed to a further extreme, might well lead him to press his proposals privately on Naomi, and to fix her acceptance of them as the price to be paid for saving her cousins' life.

To these conclusions I arrived after much thinking. I had determined, on Naomi's account, to clear the matter up; but it is only candid to add, that my doubts of John Jago's existence remained unshaken by the letter. I believed it to be nothing more nor less than a heartless and stupid "hoax."

The striking of the hall-clock roused me from my meditations. I counted the strokes—midnight!

I rose to go up to my room. Everybody else in the farm had retired to bed, as usual, more than an hour since. The stillness in the house was breathless. I walked softly, by instinct, as I crossed the room to look out at the night. A lovely moonlight met my view: it was like the moonlight on the fatal evening when Naomi had met John Jago on the garden-walk.

My bedroom-candle was on the side-table : I had just lit it. I was just leaving the room, when the door suddenly opened, and Naomi herself stood before me !

Recovering the first shock of her sudden appearance, I saw instantly, in her eager eyes, in her deadly pale cheeks, that something serious had happened. A large cloak was thrown over her ; a white handkerchief was tied over her head. Her hair was in disorder : she had evidently just risen in fear and in haste from her bed.

"What is it ?" I asked, advancing to meet her.

She clung trembling with agitation to my arm.

"John Jago !" she whispered.

You will think my obstinacy invincible. I could hardly believe it, even then !

"Do you mean John Jago's ghost ?" I asked.

"I have seen John Jago himself," she answered.

"Where ?"

"In the back yard, under my bedroom-window !"

The emergency was far too serious to allow of any consideration for the small proprieties of everyday life.

"Let me see him !" I said.

"I am here to fetch you," she replied, in her frank and fearless way. "Come upstairs with me."

Her room was on the first floor of the house, and was the only bedroom which looked out on the back yard. On our way up the stairs she told me what had happened.

"I was in bed," she said, "but not asleep, when I heard a pebble strike against the window-pane. I waited, wondering what it meant. Another pebble was thrown against the glass. So far I was surprised, but not frightened. I got up, and ran to the window to look out. There was John Jago, looking up at me in the moonlight!"

"Did he see you?"

"Yes. He said, 'Come down and speak to me! I have something serious to say to you!'"

"Did you answer him?"

"As soon as I could fetch my breath, I said, 'Wait a little,' and ran downstairs to you. What shall I do?"

"Let me see him, and I will tell you."

We entered her room. Keeping cautiously behind the window-curtain, I looked out.

There he was! His beard and moustache were shaved off: his hair was cut close. But there was no disguising his wild brown eyes, or the peculiar movement of his spare wiry figure, as he walked slowly to and fro in the moonlight, waiting for Naomi. For the moment, my own agitation almost overpowered me: I had so firmly disbelieved that John Jago was a living man!

"What shall I do?" Naomi repeated.

"Is the door of the dairy open?" I asked.

"No; but the door of the tool-house, round the corner, is not locked."

"Very good. Show yourself at the window, and say to him, 'I am coming directly.'"

The brave girl obeyed me without a moment's hesitation.

There had been no doubt about his eyes and his gait ; there was no doubt now about his voice as he answered softly from below,—

“ All right !”

“ Keep him talking to you where he is now,” I said to Naomi, “ until I have time to get round by the other way to the tool-house. Then pretend to be fearful of discovery at the dairy ; and bring him round the corner, so that I can hear him behind the door.”

We left the house together, and separated silently. Naomi followed my instructions with a woman's quick intelligence where stratagems are concerned. I had hardly been a minute in the tool-house before I heard him speaking to Naomi on the other side of the door.

The first words which I caught distinctly related to his motive for secretly leaving the farm. . Mortified pride—doubly mortified by Naomi's contemptuous refusal, and by the personal indignity offered to him by Ambrose—was at the bottom of his conduct in absenting himself from Morwick. He owned that he had seen the advertisement, and that it had actually encouraged him to keep in hiding !

“ After being laughed at and insulted and denied, I was glad,” said the miserable wretch, “ to see that some of you had serious reason to wish me back



“ ‘Will you have me for your husband.—yes or no?’ ‘No!’ she answered, loudly and firmly ”—p. 319

again. It rests with you, Miss Naomi, to keep me here, and to persuade me to save Ambrose by showing myself, and owning to my name."

"What do you mean?" I heard Naomi ask, sternly.

He lowered his voice ; but I could still hear him.

"Promise you will marry me," he said, "and I will go before the magistrate to-morrow, and show him that I am a living man."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"In that case you will lose me again, and none of you will find me till Ambrose is hanged."

"Are you villain enough, John Jago, to mean what you say?" asked the girl, raising her voice.

"If you attempt to give the alarm," he answered, "as true as God's above us, you will feel my hand on your throat! It's my turn, now, miss; and I am not to be trifled with. Will you have me for your husband,—yes or no?"

"No!" she answered, loudly and firmly.

I threw open the door, and seized him as he lifted his hand on her. He had not suffered from the nervous derangement which had weakened me, and he was the stronger man of the two. Naomi saved my life. She struck up his pistol as he pulled it out of his pocket with his free hand and presented it at his head. The bullet was fired into the air. I tripped up his heels at the same moment. The report of the pistol had alarmed the house. We two together kept him on the ground until help arrived.

CHAPTER XII.

T H E E N D O F I T.

JOHN JAGO was brought before the magistrate, and John Jago was identified the next day.

The lives of Ambrose and Silas were, of course, no longer in peril, so far as human justice was concerned. But there were legal delays to be encountered, and legal formalities to be observed, before the brothers could be released from prison in the characters of innocent men.

During the interval which thus elapsed, certain events happened which may be briefly mentioned here before I close my narrative.

Mr. Meadowcroft the elder, broken by the suffering which he had gone through, died suddenly of a rheumatic affection of the heart. A codicil attached to his will abundantly justified what Naomi had told me of Miss Meadowcroft's influence over her father, and of the end she had in view in exercising it. A life-income only was left to Mr. Meadowcroft's sons. The freehold of the farm was bequeathed to his daughter, with the testator's recommendation added, that she should marry his "best and dearest friend, Mr. John Jago."

Armed with the power of the will, the heiress of Morwick sent an insolent message to Naomi, requesting her no longer to consider herself one of the inmates at the farm. Miss Meadowcroft, it

should be here added, positively refused to believe that John Jago had ever asked Naomi to be his wife, or had ever threatened her, as I had heard him threaten her, if she refused. She accused me, as she accused Naomi, of trying meanly to injure John Jago in her estimation, out of hatred towards "that much-injured man;" and she sent to me, as she had sent to Naomi, a formal notice to leave the house.

We two banished ones met the same day in the hall, with our travelling bags in our hands.

"We are turned out together, friend Lefrank," said Naomi, with her quaintly comical smile. "You will go back to England, I guess; and I must make my own living in my own country. Women can get employment in the States if they have a friend to speak for them. Where shall I find somebody who can give me a place?"

I saw my way to saying the right word at the right moment.

"I have got a place to offer you," I replied, "if you see no objection to accepting it."

She suspected nothing, so far.

"That's lucky, sir," was all she said. "Is it in a telegraph-office or in a dry-goods store?"

I astonished my little American friend by taking her then and there in my arms, and giving her my first kiss.

"The office is by my fireside," I said. "The salary is anything in reason you like to ask me

for. And the place, Naomi, if you have no objection to it, is the place of my wife."

I have no more to say, except that years have passed since I spoke those words, and that I am as fond of Naomi as ever.

Some months after our marriage, Mrs. Lefrank wrote to a friend at Narrabee for news of what was going on at the farm. The answer informed us that Ambrose and Silas had emigrated to New Zealand, and that Miss Meadowcroft was alone at Morwick Farm. John Jago had refused to marry her. John Jago had disappeared again, nobody knew where.

NOTE IN CONCLUSION.—The first idea of this little story was suggested to the author by a printed account of a trial which actually took place, early in the present century, in the United States. The recently-published narrative of the case is entitled "The Trial, Confessions, and Conviction of Jesse and Stephen Boorn for the Murder of Russell Colvin, and the Return of the Man supposed to have been murdered. By Hon. Leonard Sargeant, Ex-Lieutenant-Governor of Vermont. (Manchester, Vermont, Journal Book and Job Office, 1873.)" It may not be amiss to add, for the benefit of incredulous readers, that all the "improbable events" in the story are matters of fact, taken from the printed narrative. Anything which "looks like truth" is, in nine cases out of ten, the invention of the author.—W. C.

THE END.



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